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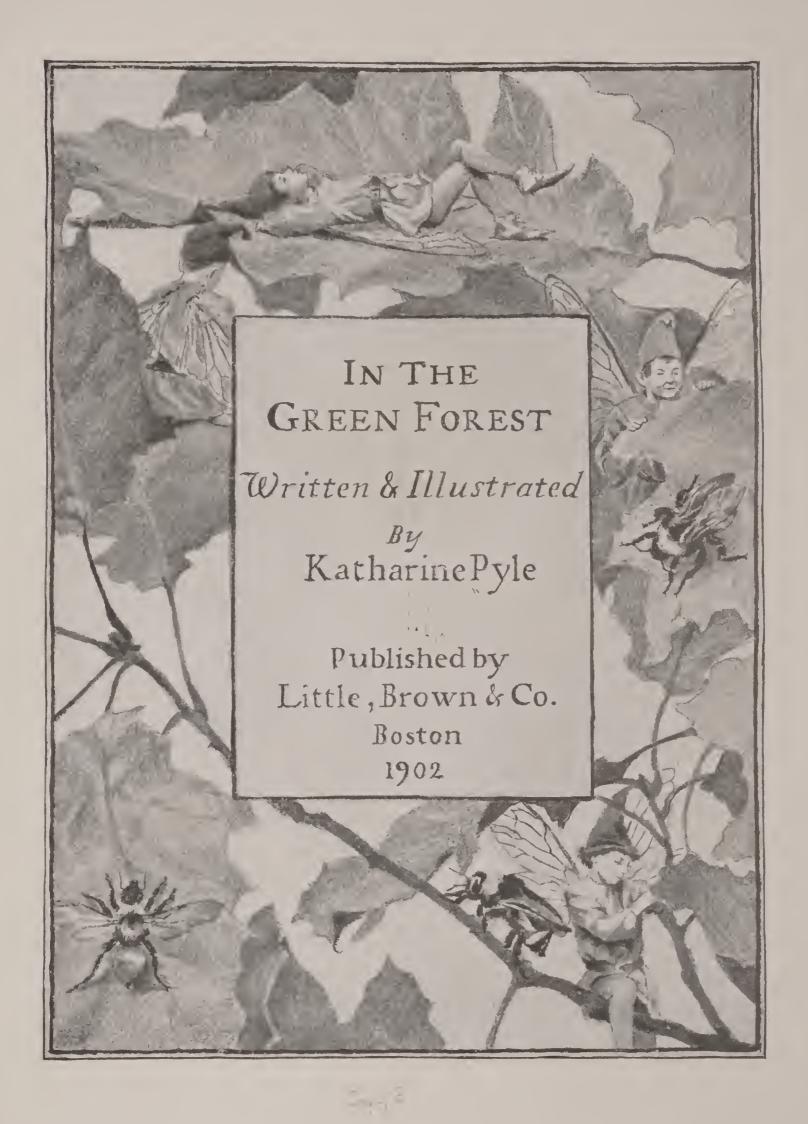
## IN THE GREEN FOREST







"He put the chain over his head and let the jewel rest upon the boy's breast."

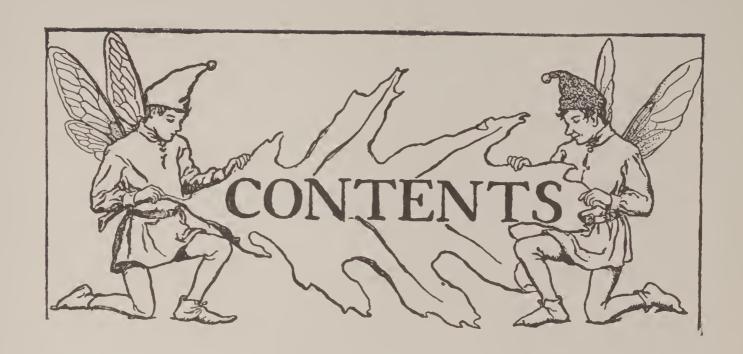


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### IN THE GREEN FOREST



### CHAPTER I

THE ELF SHOWS RED CAP SOME MAGIC

T was Thursday, the fairies' feast day. On Thursdays Mother Peaspod generally had for dinner a grasshopper's thigh roasted and with a sauce

of honey poured over it,—a dish that Father Peaspod was especially fond of.

On this particular Thursday Father Peaspod carved

the roast as usual, and then, after helping each one to the proper share, he looked about the table. "You forgot the bread," he said to his wife.

"No, I did n't forget it, but Buzzfuzz has n't come back yet. I waited for him as long as I dared, and then I thought I'd better have dinner anyway before the roast dried in the oven."

"I'd almost as lieve not have any dinner as have it without bread," Father Peaspod grumbled.

"There comes Buzzfuzz now," cried Red Cap, as a large bee crawled through the knot-hole which was the front door.

Mother Peaspod gave an exclamation of relief, and hastened to get a plate. Upon this she emptied the pollen that filled the basket-like hollows in the hind legs of the bee. Then she put the full plate on the table.

"I really think we'll have to get a new bee," said Father Peaspod, as he helped himself to some pollen, or bee bread, as the fairies call it. "Buzzfuzz is getting quite lazy."

"Oh, yes, father," cried Red Cap, eagerly, "and give Buzzfuzz to me. Then I'll have a bee of my very own to fetch my dinner."

Red Cap was extravagantly fond of bee bread; he would have liked to live on it altogether. And indeed it is very healthful food for fairies. Some of the babies are brought up on it almost entirely. Every well-to-do family keeps one or more bees

# The Elf shows Red Cap some Magic

about the house so that they can have fresh bread every day. The fairies make great pets of their bees, feeding them with honey, or other dainties, and keeping them well brushed.

Father Peaspod laughed when Red Cap said he wanted one of his own. "Why should you want one, my son? You're too young to be owning bees yet."

"Well, to-morrow's my birthday, father, and I'll be a hundred. I don't think a hundred's so very young."

"No," said Mother Peaspod with a sigh, "you're not my little baby any more, you're getting such a big lad."

"A hundred!" quavered old Grandaddy Dandelion. "I remember when I was a hundred I thought I was almost as big a fairy as my father. My grandfather gave me a talisman on that day. I used it until I grew too old to go flying about the world, and then I laid it away to give to my grandson when he was a hundred. To-morrow it shall be yours, Red Cap, as a birthday gift."

"A talisman, grandfather! What is a talisman?" asked the boy.

"It's something to wear to protect you from evil."

"What sort of a thing?"

But the grandfather would tell him no more about it. "Wait until to-morrow and you'll see," was all he would say.

Having finished his dinner, Red Cap now wiped his mouth and rose. Before he left the table, however, he said, as all fairy children are taught to say after meals,—

"Meat and drink have made me glad; Thanks, good mother, for what I 've had."

Then at a nod from his mother away he ran, glad to get back to his play.

As he came out from the tree Red Cap stood for a moment looking all about. Bluebell, his favorite playmate, had promised to come out again as soon as she had finished her dinner.

She was not in sight, but she might be somewhere about. Spreading his gauzy wings Red Cap dropped lightly to the ground.

Then he ran along toward the tree where Bluebell lived, amusing himself as he went. Sometimes he stopped to dance with his shadow in a sun-fleck that slipped between the great green leaves far overhead. Sometimes he jumped on the back of a hurrying black cricket for a ride; these rides did

# The Elf shows Red Cap some Magic

not last long, however, as the crickets' backs were so hard and shiny he soon slipped off. Sometimes he paused to watch a spotted lady-bug climbing up a tall grass stem.

At last, running under a deserted-spider's web that stretched above him like a tent, he happened to look up, and saw Bluebell sitting in the spider's tunnel and looking out at him through a hole in the web.

"Hello, you there pretending you're a spider, I see you," cried Red Cap. He climbed upon the spider's web and ran across it, taking very high steps as it bent under his weight.

Suddenly he paused. Sitting at the edge of the tunnel and talking with Bluebell was a mischievous elf named Nightshade who had come lately to live in a beech-tree near by. An old flying squirrel used to stay in that tree, but Nightshade had driven her away and taken possession of her entire hoard of nuts. There he lived all alone except for his bee, an ugly, cross insect named Gripper.

None of the fairies had much to do with this elf, but he used to watch them from his knot-hole and throw down empty nutshells at them when they were playing.

Red Cap did not like to see Nightshade sitting

there and talking so familiarly to his own especial playmate.

"Bluebell," he called, "are n't you coming to play with me?"

"No, she's going to play with me; are n't you, Bluebell?" cried Nightshade.

"I don't know," said the fairy, swaying herself in the tunnel so the whole web shook, "I don't know yet what I'm going to do."

"Why, Bluebell," said Red Cap, "you said you'd play with me after dinner. And I would n't play with an elf anyway."

"Oh, you would n't, would n't you?" cried Night-shade. "Well, I guess I can do things that you can't, even if I am an elf. She's going to stay here with me and I'm going to show her some magic."

Now very few of the simple wood fairies know how to do any magic at all, so when Nightshade said this, Red Cap felt somewhat taken aback for a moment. Then he said, "Pooh! I don't believe you know any magic."

- "Don't I? Well I guess I do, too."
- "What can you do?"
- "Oh, lots of things."
- "But what?"

# The Elf shows Red Cap some Magic

- "I shan't tell you."
- "Because you can't."
- "Yes, I can, too." Then, as Red Cap still looked doubtful, the elf added, "Well maybe I'll show you one magic trick, but I shan't show you any but this one." Nightshade looked about him. Just overhead a great greyish cocoon was hanging.
  - "Do you see that cocoon?" asked the elf.
  - "Yes."
  - "Well, do you know what made it?"
  - "A caterpillar, of course."
  - "And do you know what's coming out of it?"
- "Yes, I do; I've often seen them; a big brown moth with a spot on each wing."
- "A big brown moth with a spot on each wing," repeated the mischievous elf. "And only one. Well, now I'll show you you don't know as much as you thought. Here's magic for you."

The elf reached up, and by standing on his tiptoes he could just touch the cocoon. He tapped on it with his tiny, tiny nail and it sounded dry and hollow. As if in answer to his knock was suddenly heard a rustling and gnawing inside, audible to fairy ears. Then, while the fairies stared with all their eyes, a slight opening appeared and out through it crept, not the crumpled moth they

had expected, but a very small winged fly. It was followed by another and another and another, and others followed them, twenty in all. Bluebell counted them, more and more surprised as each appeared. It did indeed seem like magic, just like the sleight-of-hand man when he takes a big flag and shakes it, and out from it come dozens and dozens of little flags, and nobody knows how they got in it.

"There! You could n't do that, could you?" asked Nightshade, triumphantly.

"No," Red Cap was obliged to admit, "I could n't do that."

"No, you could n't do any magic and I can do lots, and Bluebell's coming to play with me and talk about magic; ain't you, Bluebell?"

"Yes," and Bluebell suddenly climbed out of the tunnel. "I'm going to play with you." Nightshade took her hand and together they ran across the web. At the edge of it the elf paused and looked back. "Don't you follow us," he said, "or I won't talk about magic."

Bluebell also glanced back, and seeing how sad Red Cap looked she felt sorry for him. "You learn some magic, Red Cap," she said, "and then you can play with us, too." Then she and Nightshade

## The Elf shows Red Cap some Magic

jumped down to the ground and ran away together hand in hand.

After they had gone, Red Cap got down from the web and walked slowly away. He did not care to play now that Bluebell had run away from him. The other fairies called to him to come and join their games, for he was a great favorite, but he only shook his head and wandered off by himself.

After a while he went home.

"Why, Red Cap, what makes you come back so early?" asked his mother. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," answered the boy. Then he sat down on the edge of the knot-hole swinging his heels.

Old Grandaddy Dandelion was sitting in the knot-hole, too, watching the fairies at their games below. Sometimes he laughed his cackling old laugh at some of their queer pranks. "Why don't you go down and play with them?" he asked, but Red Cap only shook his head.

Presently he said, "Grandfather do you know any magic?"

"Magic! No; what should I do with magic, living here in this quiet forest? Though there was a time," the old fairy added after a moment,

"when I would have been glad enough to know something of it." There was a silence while Red Cap kicked his heels against a piece of bark, and looked moodily down at the games.

By and by the grandfather spoke again: "Why did you ask me about magic? What have you got in your head?"

"Nothing; only I wish I knew some."

"Do not wish that, my son," said the old fairy earnestly. "It may be a pleasant thing to know, but it means that one has travelled far and seen many strange doings; that one has been hungry and thirsty and lonely, too, if one can work magic things."

Red Cap made no answer, and Grandaddy Dandelion too was silent. Both seemed to be watching the fairies below, but neither of the two really saw them. Their thoughts were busy upon other things, and both were thinking of magic.

### CHAPTER II

#### RED CAP STARTS OUT IN THE WORLD

"To think," said Mother Peaspod,
"that just a hundred years ago I held
you in my arms for the first time, such
a wee little thing, not larger than the grub of a bee."

"Did n't look unlike one either," Father Peaspod added.

But this the mother would not allow; "I don't think so at all; such a fuzzy round head he had; such cunning little hands and feet, and finished off with the tiniest little nails."

It made Red Cap feel very queer to be talked about that way; he hardly knew how to look.

His father and mother had given him, for his birthday gift, a new suit, all of green, and a new red cap coming up to a point. When he put it on he made one think of a green leaf that had just been tipped with red by the frost.

"A hundred years old!" said old Grandaddy Dandelion. "And I promised you a talisman on your birthday, did n't I?"

Red Cap had been thinking of that, though he had not liked to say anything about it. Now he watched his grandfather eagerly as the old fairy hobbled over to the fire-place. If Red Cap looked like a leaf just touched with frost, Grandaddy Dandelion looked like one that had been dried and withered by a long winter of sun and rain.

Beside the fire-place was a deep worm-hole, where Grandaddy had stored his most precious treasures. He stuck his hand in it and fumbled about for a while, drawing out one thing after another, none of which seemed to be the right one. At last he took out a little package carefully wrapped up in the silk of a milk-weed. He gave a little cluck of satisfaction as he saw it. Putting back the other things he proceeded to unwrap layer after layer of the silk, while Red Cap watched him breathlessly. At last from the heart of the wrappings he took out something and held it up for them all to see. They gave a cry of admiration.

Hanging by an exquisitely wrought chain of gold, no coarser than a strand of spider-web, was a round jewel; a jewel as clear as a dewdrop, and

## Red Cap Starts Out in the World

shining with changing lights of all colors. It was set in a circlet of gold, and as it swung from the chain it seemed to light up the hollow with its brightness.

The old fairy looked at it lovingly for a moment. Then stepping to Red Cap he put the chain over his head and let the jewel rest upon the boy's breast. "It is yours, my child," he said. "Guard it carefully; never part with it, for it is the talisman of which I spoke. As long as you wear it no evil thing can have any power over you except by your own will."

"But, grandfather, do you mean really to give it to me?" asked Red Cap. "Don't you want to keep it yourself?"

"No, no; I have no need of it, and it is for you I have been hoarding it."

Red Cap was so pleased he hardly knew how to thank the old fairy. He held the jewel in his hands for some time turning it this way and that to catch the play of colors. When at last he let it drop upon his breast and lifted his eyes he seemed somehow different. He looked less of a child and more of a youth. "And now, mother, and father, and grandfather too," he said, "now that I have this talisman I am less afraid to tell

you of what I have set my heart on." He paused, and then in a moment he added, "I want to go out in the world in search of some one to teach me magic."

"Oh, no, no, my son," cried Mother Peaspod, while his father looked grave.

"I knew it was coming," said the old grandfather. "I knew the signs."

"Is your heart quite set on this, my son?" asked Peaspod.

"Yes, father, it is."

"And have you counted the cost?"

"Yes, I have done that, too. All last night I lay awake, thinking and thinking."

Mother Peaspod began to cry softly to herself. "Oh, my little Red Cap; my baby boy," she lamented; "how can you plan to leave us so; to fly out into the world away from mother and the dear home hollow?"

Red Cap hesitated, turning a pained look upon his mother, but Grandaddy Dandelion spoke up with authority. "Hush, daughter," he said. "It is a brave thought of Red Cap's. He is no longer a baby except in your love. I remember when I was his age you could no more have kept me from wandering than you can keep the down of my

## Red Cap Starts Out in the World

name-flower from blowing in the wind. The talisman I gave him will keep him from all harm, and he will come back contented and ready to settle down. Let him go, I say."

The old fairy's word was still law in the hollow of the tree, so after that neither Father nor Mother Peaspod made any objections to Red Cap's plan. Instead they began to talk of what the boy should take with him on his journey, and to wonder in what direction he ought to go.

As to the direction, however, Grandaddy Dandelion could tell them. That was easy enough. the lad would have to do was to follow up the stream that flowed through their grove. When he came to its source he would find himself on the borders of the enchanted country; "and in that country," said the old fairy, "are those who can teach you magic. That much I know, but beyond that you will have to look out for yourself. I went to the edge of that land when I was young but I never crossed the border. No," and the old fairy shook his head, "I got that far and then I turned back. Maybe I would have been happier if I had gone on and learned the magic I longed to know, but I have had a good enough sort of life as it is."

"I shall go on," said Red Cap proudly.

The grandfather looked at him. "Yes, you will go on, but then you are a different sort of boy from what I was."

News travels fast among the fairies. Before noon every wee creature in the grove knew that Red Cap was going to journey to the enchanted land to learn magic. When he went among them he found himself treated with a new sort of respect that was very pleasant.

Father Peaspod was worried fearing it might make the lad vain, but the old grandfather said wisely enough, "Let him alone. Let the child enjoy it while he can. He will have hard enough knocks when he is once out in the world with none of his old friends round him."

The next day, while Red Cap was standing under a fern leaf, Nightshade marched up to him followed lingeringly by Bluebell.

"So," said the elf, looking the fairy up and down, "I hear you are going out into the world to learn magic."

"Yes, I am," answered Red Cap with some reserve.

"So I heard, but I hardly believed it. I did n't know you had that much pluck in you."

## Red Cap Starts Out in the World

"Did n't you?"

"No, I didn't; but I was glad to hear it, and now I 've been thinking it over and I 've a mind to join you and journey out into the world with you."

"You!" cried Red Cap. "But you know magic already."

"Yes, of course I know as much magic as there's any use in knowing, but the fact is I'm getting a bit rusty; I would n't mind brushing up my knowledge a little."

"But Nightshade," cried Bluebell, "you said you were going to teach me magic, and you have n't. You have n't shown me the least bit except that one trick."

"Pooh! A girl fairy can't learn magic," said the elf scornfully.

Bluebell's lip trembled. She looked so pitiful that Red Cap's heart melted. "Never mind, Bluebell," he cried, "I'm going to learn magic and I'll teach you."

"Oh, will you, dear Red Cap?" and the little fairy clasped her hands. "You're so good. You're a great deal kinder than Nightshade; I liked you better all the time anyway."

The elf made a face. "I don't care. I'll learn so much magic I won't care whether you like me

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or not. Come on, Red Cap," and he linked his arm through the lad's; "let's go plan about our journey, and when we'd better start."

Red Cap was not particularly delighted at the idea of having Nightshade for a travelling companion, but he did not know very well how to get out of it. However, after the elf had talked to him for a while, he began to feel better pleased. Nightshade could make himself very pleasant and amusing when he chose, and Red Cap began to think he would make a very good comrade on the journey after all.

When the fairy told them about it at home, Mother Peaspod shook her head. "I never did like that elf," she said. "I'm afraid he'll get you into trouble, my son."

"Well, if he lets an elf like that lead him astray he's not fit to be travelling about the world, and he'd better turn his toes home again," said the father. As for Grandaddy Dandelion, he had firm faith in the talisman. He had no fear of any harm coming to Red Cap as long as he had that along, so nothing more was said of the matter; only the good mother put up an extra amount of food in the scrip that the elf might have some too without Red Cap's having to go the hungrier for it.

## Red Cap Starts Out in the World

If Red Cap had been left to himself he would not have taken anything. He thought it would be fun to forage as he went. Then besides, his father had given him Buzzfuzz for his own; the fairy would have him along to gather bread for him, and no doubt Nightshade would take his bee, Gripper, though Red Cap did not care much about that, — Gripper was such an ugly, cross-looking bee.

That night Father Peaspod's family stayed up late, long after the birds had sought their nests. The mother sat beside Red Cap holding his hand in hers. It seemed as though she could not bear to have this last evening come to an end.

But at last Father Peaspod arose. "Well, mother," he said, "it's time the boy was abed if he's to make an early start. Kiss him good-night and let him go."

At that Mother Peaspod threw her arms about the young fairy's neck, holding him close to her. He felt a tear trickle down his neck and tickle him. "Don't cry, mother dear," he whispered. "When I come home knowing all about magic you'll be glad I went."

"Perhaps so," wept the mother, "but it's hard to have my little son leave the old hollow."

Then they all kissed the boy and separated for the night.

It was a long time though before Red Cap could get to sleep. He rolled and tossed in the walnut-shell bed, thinking and thinking of how fine it would be to start out into the world for himself. He felt as though the morning would never come.

### CHAPTER III

## THE ELF AND THE FAIRY MEET WITH AN ADVENTURE

N spite of its having been so late before he went to sleep, Red Cap was awake the next day at the very earliest peep of dawn. Not earlier than his mother, however. He could hear her speaking softly to Father Peaspod, and reminding him that their boy was to set off on his travels that day, and that he must get up if he would say good-bye to the lad.

The forest was still hazy with the dawning as the fairies appeared at the knot-hole. Red Cap had his scrip hung over his shoulder. It was heavy with the good things his mother had packed up for him. Upon his breast the talisman glittered in the early light.

His mother threw her arms about him and kissed him. The father too kissed him upon the forehead. Old Grandaddy Dandelion was still asleep, so Red Cap left his good-bye for him. Then with a last

smile for his mother, he sprang lightly from the knot-hole and flew away through the greenness of the forest with Buzzfuzz at his heels.

His first flight, however, was not far; only to the hickory tree where the elf lived.

Alighting there, Red Cap called loudly, "Night-shade, Nightshade! Are you still asleep?"

He heard a stir and rustling within the tree and then a sleepy voice answered, "Who are you? What do you want?"

"It's Red Cap. Have you forgotten that we are to start on our journey to-day?"

"Oh, Red Cap! but it's too early to start yet."

"Not a bit of it. Waken up lazy-bones. We ought to have been off before this."

Presently Nightshade appeared rubbing the sleep from his eyes and still grumbling. "What's your hurry, anyway? There's no need of our starting off in the middle of the night, when we have a whole season before us." Gripper, following close to his master, looked just as cross and sleepy as the elf.

"Never mind," answered Red Cap. "When I'm going anywhere I believe in starting early, but if you don't want to come now you can follow when you choose."

That brought Nightshade to his senses. "Oh,

### An Adventure

all right. It does n't make any difference to me. I can start just as early as you. Just wait a minute." He plunged his hands into a large drop of dew on a leaf near by, and after washing his face he seemed wide awake and in a better humor.

"Where away first?" he asked.

"Oh, to the stream;" and Red Cap told Night-shade the directions he had received from his grandfather.

"All right, I'm ready," the elf responded.

It had been decided the day before, when the elf and the fairy had talked over the journey, that it would be better to begin by flying, only walking when their wings grew too tired to carry them further.

Now as they launched themselves out into the cool morning air, Red Cap felt so fresh and happy that he turned three somersaults without stopping. Coming up a little dizzy he hung lightly in the air, his wings making a quiver about him like the wings of a humming-bird. "That's right," grumbled Nightshade. "Tire yourself all out before we start."

Red Cap, however, only laughed merrily, and darted away toward the brook so swiftly that the elf had much ado to keep up with him.

Early as it was when they reached the edge of

the stream, they found some busy housewife from a neighboring tree had already been there. On a spider-web line, stretched from an ironweed to a Solomon's-seal, was hung a row of tiny clothes she had been washing in the brook. Nobody was in sight, however; perhaps she was already at breakfast, early as it was.

Nightshade, who was a greedy elf, would have liked to stop and see, and perhaps get invited to join her at her meal, but Red Cap reminded him that they had planned to eat their breakfasts at a grassy open some distance up the stream; an open well known to them, where the fairies went sometimes to dance in fairy rings.

When they reached that spot they found the grass spread thickly all about with what looked like spider's-webs, but the two companions knew it to be fairy linen spread out there to bleach in the dew and moonlight of the night before. Everything was drenched with dew and there was still a chill in the early air.

The two travellers looked about until they found where a leaf had fallen. They caught it by its edges and shoved it aside, and the ground under it was dry. There they snuggled down and made ready to break their fast.

#### An Adventure

Red Cap unslung the bag he had been carrying at his back, and set out the food his mother had packed for him. Nightshade's eyes sparkled as he saw all the good things. There were tender slices cut from a cold grasshopper's thigh; there

was some walnut powder to
eat with it,
and a bottle
full of honey
milk, milked
the night before from Father Peaspod's
herd of aphides, and put
up for the refreshment of
the travellers.



"He set out the food his mother had packed for him."

Besides this, fast as they had flown, Buzzfuzz had managed to gather a supply of bee bread, so they had that too.

They made a fine breakfast while the sky above the forest slowly brightened, and the chill faded from the air.

The good meal made them lazy, and they decided

to rest awhile before journeying further. They stretched themselves at ease, blinking up at the grass-blades that arched over them, and at the great branches beyond, and as they rested they talked of all the wonderful things they would do, and be, after they had learned everything about magic.

This open was the furthest place Red Cap had ever journeyed to; Nightshade had never come far in this direction, either, and so after a while, when they had packed the remainder of the feast in the bag and resumed their journey, it was through an unknown country that they flew.

When they had gone some distance, and the morning had slipped well on towards noon, they saw a cardinal bird flash through the leaves before them like a scarlet flame. "We must be near some human beings' houses," said Nightshade.

- "Why? What makes you think that?"
- "Because you hardly ever see one of those big red birds except near houses."
- "I've always wished I could see a human being. Father Peaspod's seen lots of 'em. He says they look just like us only they're big; as big as bushes."
- "Bigger than that. You come with me and I'll show you some."

### An Adventure

"They won't hurt us, will they?" asked Red Cap, hanging back a little.

"No; they won't hurt us, but we've got to keep out of sight. You can easily do that, though, they're so stupid about seeing things. Can't you smell their fires and cooking now?"

"Yes; I did n't know what the smell was. I don't like it."

"No, they're big, coarse things, but come on."

The fairies flew on and presently found themselves on the edge of a clearing. Two or three houses were there, and the smoke from them rose thin and gray against the trees.

"Are those the human beings?" asked Red Cap, staring at the houses with all his eyes.

"No, stupid, of course not; but there are two right now." The elf pointed as he spoke toward the door of a house at which had appeared a little girl leading a smaller child by the hand.

"My! are n't they big?" cried the fairy.

"Big! Why those are only little ones. I've seen some more than twice as big as those. Look! there's one just coming out." The mother of the children had appeared behind them in the door-way.

"That is big! But I like the little ones best. They're coming this way. I wish I could see them closer."

"Well you can, only be sure they don't see you."

The children were picking flowers as they came: daisies, buttercups, clovers, and other summer flowers that grew in the clearing. They were coming over towards where the fairies were. "Don't go out of sight, children," called the mother, and the little girl called back, "No, ma'am."

They came nearer and nearer. "We'd better hide now," whispered Nightshade, and so he and his bee slipped down into one flower, while Red Cap and Buzzfuzz hid in another. Red Cap was so much interested in the children, however, that he could not help peeping out over the edge to see what they would do. The little girl was talking to the baby as they came.

"Look, baby; see all the pretty flowers. Shall sister make baby a pretty wreath?"

"Ess," said baby.

"So many pretty flowers," and the busy sister caught hold of the very branch of fox-gloves in one of which Nightshade and his bee were hiding. Red Cap gave a gasp. At the same moment

### An Adventure

Gripper shot forth from the flower and struck against the child's hand. "Oh!" she cried, and threw the flower from her, fearing she would be stung.

Red Cap was so excited that he quite forgot himself, and raised himself half out of the flower to see what was going to become of the elf.

At the same moment the eyes of the little girl fell upon him, and she gave a cry, this time of wonder. Suddenly the fairy recollected himself and dropped down into the flower and out of sight. As he did so the little girl nipped the opening of the flower together and held it so that Red Cap was shut in. Then she broke it from the stalk. "Oh, baby, baby," she shrieked in her excitement, "Sister's caught one."

"What Sister taught?" asked the little one.

"A fairy! A real live fairy! Oh, baby, baby!" and the little girl ran toward her home as fast as she could.

Meanwhile the frightened fairy cuddled deep down in the flower, wondering what was going to happen to him now. He squeezed so far down that Buzzfuzz was forced up above him toward the opening of the blossom.

Red Cap was shaken up and down and then

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came a big jolt. That was when the little girl went up the step into the house. "Mother! Mother!" she shrieked in such excitement that the mother came running, fearing her little daughter was hurt.

"What is it, my child? What 's the matter?"

"Oh, I've caught a fairy."

"A fairy! What nonsense is this? I thought you were hurt."

"No, it is a fairy. I saw him in the flower and I caught him. I know it's a fairy. I can feel him moving inside."

"It was a bee, child, or a grasshopper; your mind is always running on fairies. How often have I told you that there are no such things."

But the little girl knew she had seen it. Then the mother took the flower from her and very carefully opened it just a crack. What she saw was only the head of Buzzfuzz poked up close to the crack. "Now you see," she said, "it is only a bee."

She held it so the little girl could see. As the child peered in, the joyous excitement faded from her face; her lip trembled, and her eyes filled with tears. "I did think it was a fairy," she said. "I saw it I'm sure. Maybe it changed itself into a bee."

#### An Adventure

The mother smiled. "Shall we let the bee fairy go?" she asked. "I think he would like to get out."

"Oh, yes; he might as well go," said the child sadly.

The mother took away her fingers and the flower opened. Away flew Buzzfuzz, booming as he went, and away after him shot Red Cap like a flash of light. "Oh, mother, mother," he heard the child cry, "it was a fairy," and then he was out of hearing, nor did he stop until he found himself deep in the forest again, and out of sight of the clearing.

#### CHAPTER IV

HOW RED CAP AND NIGHTSHADE SAVED THE EGGS

"TELL you're a pretty one," cried Nightshade who had been watching for Red Cap from the edge of the open, and had followed him into the woods. "What made you stand up in the flower that way, so the human could see you?"

"I did n't know what was going to happen to you when she threw the flower away," said the fairy.

"Well, if you're going to act that way we might as well turn back right now, for we'll be sure to get caught."

Red Cap promised that he would not be so thoughtless again, so they continued their journey, Nightshade still grumbling to himself.

Almost the whole day they flew, for they found the walking slow and rough work, and both feet and wings were weary by the time they reached an open glade. As the light was failing they decided to camp there for the night.

# How They Saved the Eggs

They were almost too tired to eat, though Buzzfuzz brought them some delicious bee-bread quite different from anything they had tasted before. He must have found some new variety of flower.

"I don't think your Gripper is of much use," said Red Cap. "He never seems to bring you anything."

"Yes he does, too," answered Nightshade. "Just you wait until to-morrow and I'll have him catch us a dinner."

" Catch!" cried Red Cap. "How do you mean catch?"

"Oh, wait and you 'll see."

Red Cap was really too tired to feel very curious, so the two travellers crawled under a large leaf that made a convenient tent close by, and were soon fast asleep.

Just as he was dozing off, Red Cap felt Buzzfuzz snuggle down close beside him; he rested his cheek against the bee's soft fur, and it felt homey and comfortable. He thought of the hollow in the old white oak and wondered dreamily whether Father Peaspod had caught a new bee, and then in a moment he thought of nothing at all, for he was fast asleep.

The travellers slept late the next morning. Red 33 3

Cap awoke first, disturbed by a confused sense that some one was scolding at him. As he became wider awake he knew that the sound he heard was not a scolding voice, but the crying of some bird outside. He could tell by the sound that it was not only in distress, but in fear and anger as well.

He leaned over and shook Nightshade, who was still asleep. "Let me alone," cried the elf, without opening his eyes. "Let me alone. I'm going to tie it by the tail."

"Nightshade!" cried Red Cap.

Then the elf sat up and looked about him. "What's the matter?" he asked. "I thought I'd caught a long green caterpillar and you wanted me to tie it by the head, but it had teeth and was going to bite me."

"Listen," said Red Cap. "There's some bird in trouble out there. Let's go and see what it is."

"What for? it's none of our business."

"But maybe we could help it."

Red Cap crawled out from under the leaf, followed after a moment by Nightshade.

As they came from the shadow of their tent, into the brightness of the morning outside and looked about them, they very soon saw what the trouble was.

## How They Saved the Eggs

In a bush high overhead a warbler had built its nest and laid its eggs. A small sized snake was looping and writhing up toward this nest, thinking no doubt, to make a fine breakfast on what it would find there. The frightened mother and father birds were fluttering wildly about, now striking at the snake with their wings, now darting away as it shot out its forked tongue at them.

Though the snake was small, it looked as big as a dragon to the fairy and the elf.

On the top of the leaf tent, Gripper was calmly sitting and watching the fight.

"Oh, those poor birds," cried Red Cap. "What trouble they're in."

"Well, it's none of our business," Nightshade repeated.

"But it is our business, for maybe we can help them."

"Why should we do that? We might get into trouble."

"I'm going to see what I can do, anyway."

Red Cap spread his wings (they were still somewhat stiff from his travels of the day before) and flew swiftly up to the edge of the nest.

As he alighted there and looked down into the great round hollow he saw it held four beautifully

shaped, speckled eggs. It seemed, indeed, a pity that such pretty things should serve no better purpose than to be a breakfast for a snake.

Glancing around Red Cap saw that the reptile was still writhing slowly up the bush and nearer and nearer to the nest in spite of the parent birds.

"Nightshade, Nightshade," he called sharply, "come up here."

Somewhat unwillingly the elf spread his wings and flew up beside Red Cap. "Well, what is it?"

- "Look down there in the nest. Are n't those pretty?"
  - "They are pretty," the elf admitted.
  - "How do you think we could save them?"
  - "We can't."
  - "Yes, we must. Think of some way. Quick!"
  - "Maybe we might carry them away."
- "Oh, yes; let us try. Perhaps we can save one or two at any rate." Red Cap jumped down into the nest, and getting both arms around one of the eggs, he managed to hoist it upon his shoulder. Nightshade did the same. "Where shall we take them?" gasped the fairy.
  - "To the nearest tree."



"Staring down at him with cruel, unblinking eyes, was the head of the snake."



## How They Saved the Eggs

They had to climb up to the edge of the nest with their loads so as to get a good start for their flight.

The mother bird caught sight of them. "Look, look!" she shrieked to her mate.

"We're only saving them for you," cried Red Cap; "we'll bring them back."

The birds seemed to understand immediately, and returned to their attack on the snake.

"There's a good tree to carry them to," said Red Cap, nodding toward a broad boughed birch.

"All right," Nightshade agreed.

The two flew heavily over to the tree, and, after looking it over, soon found a little hollow where they could safely lay the eggs. Then they darted back to get the others.

Nightshade was older and stronger than Red Cap, and so it happened that he had shouldered his second egg and started with it toward the tree, while the fairy was still toiling up the side of the nest. Suddenly a shadow fell upon Red Cap. He glanced up and then gave such a start that the egg nearly slipped from his hold; there, close above him, staring down at him with cruel, unblinking eyes was the head of the snake.

Red Cap shrank back into the nest, and laying

down the egg cowered over it wondering whether he should make a dart past the snake and so try to escape, or whether he should stay and defend his burden.

At that moment there was a humming sound, and Buzzfuzz alighted just above on the edge of the nest. Red Cap could tell by the sound he made and by the quivering of his wings that he was very angry. A sudden thought filled the fairy with hope. "At him! At him, good Buzzfuzz," he cried. The bee rose with an angry hum. "At him, old fellow," called Red Cap again.

Then the bee darted at the snake, striking at it with its sting. The serpent reared its head, hissing. Again and again the brave bee darted at it, now on this side, now on that, cheered on by Red Cap's voice.

The skin of the snake was too tough for it to be really stung, but it did not like to have the bee darting at it in that way. Neither did it like the looks of the fairy that it had seen crouching in the nest and looking up at it.

Slowly, very slowly, it loosened its hold on the branches and began to drop down from one bough to another, constantly darting out its quivering tongue. The birds and the bee still followed

## How They Saved the Eggs

and tormented it. At last the snake reached the ground, and with a last hiss glided away through the grass and was soon lost to sight.

The two birds did not pursue it further. They flew back to the nest and looked anxiously down into it. "Gone! All gone but one," wailed the mother bird.

"But they're safe; quite safe," Red Cap made haste to assure her. "Nightshade and I just carried them away for safety, and we're going to bring them back."

"Where are they?" asked the father bird.

"I'll show you;" and Red Cap flew away toward the beech tree followed closely by the birds.

When they reached the hollow where the eggs had been put they found Nightshade already there. He looked at them somewhat queerly. There were only two eggs there. "What did you do with the other?" asked Red Cap.

Nightshade hesitated. Then he swallowed once or twice. "I dropped it," he confessed at last.

"Dropped it!" cried the mother bird. "Alas! alas! my beautiful egg. What good did it do to carry it out of the snake's reach just to have it broken."

"Tut! tut! my dear," said the father bird.

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"Is n't that rather ungrateful? It's very bad to have one of the eggs broken no doubt; but just think, if it had n't been for these fairies and their bee, it might have been all four instead of one."

"But here are these eggs over here, and one in the nest," the mother still lamented, "and what are we to do about that? Dear knows I'm willing to sit day and night; but part here and part there, with all the good will in the world I can't sit on both places at the same time."

"But the fairies brought them here and no doubt they mean to carry them back again;" and the father bird cocked his head on one side and looked enquiringly at the wee folk with his bright black eyes.

"Oh, yes, we meant to, of course," Red Cap hastened to assure him.

"Well! I hope they'll be more careful about carrying them back than they were about bringing them," said the mother bird sadly.

"We will; we'll be very very careful, won't we, Nightshade?" Red Cap felt terribly about the broken egg even if he had n't done it himself.

Nightshade muttered something in his throat, and then the two shouldered their burdens once

## How They Saved the Eggs

more and carried them slowly and carefully back to the nest.

As soon as the eggs were laid in it the mother bird hopped down and settled herself upon them. Her glossy feathers filled the nest up to the brim. Only her head appeared above the edge, and her tail stuck out in the opposite direction. "How strange and empty it feels," she said with a sigh, "to have only three eggs under one instead of four."

The father bird seemed somewhat ashamed of his mate's lack of gratitude. He thanked the two travellers again and again, particularly Red Cap, and begged them to stay and pay him and his mate a visit.

The travellers refused, however, saying that they must be journeying on; they had already lingered too long. Then Red Cap spoke of why they were going. That they were on the way to the land of enchantment to find one who would teach them magic.

"Is that so!" cried the bird with interest. "Do you know we used to have a nest on the very borders of that country. You remember, my dear, don't you?" and he turned to his mate.

"Remember what?" asked the lady bird. She had not been listening to the conversation.

"That year we had a nest on the edge of the land of enchantment."

"Remember? Of course I do. I never knew a place where there were so few worms or of such a poor quality."

"That is true. But I was going to tell our friends here something about it. I suppose you 're following up the stream, are n't you?"

They told him they were.

"Well, when you reach its source you'll find it starts from a nutshell, and beyond that nutshell you will see a hedge, and beyond that hedge are two paths. The one path leads to the right and the other to the left. There is magic at the end of each of them, but it is the right hand path that you must take, for that leads you to the Sun Queen, and all her magic is white. The left hand path leads to the Shadow Mother, and her magic is an ill thing, for it is all black. Be sure you remember; the road to the right and not the left."

"Had n't you better tell them about eating and drinking too?" the warbler's wife suggested.

"I suppose it would do no harm to tell them, though as long as they keep to the right they're all safe anyway. What she means is this," the sparrow went on, turning again to the two travel-

## How They Saved the Eggs

lers; "even if people do get confused and go to the left the magic there can have no real power over them as long as they eat and drink only what they carry with them from the parting of the ways. It might be as well for you to remember that."

"But how do you know so much about it, anyway?" asked Nightshade.

"Oh, when we had our nest near there I used to see many a traveller making his choice of the way. I've even taken some little flights up the two paths myself just to see what they were like, and what was happening there. Oh, yes, you may trust me; I know what I'm talking about."

Red Cap said he was sure of it, and thanked the warbler gratefully for his advice.

"It's little enough to do after the way you've helped us," answered the bird.

Then they all said good-bye, and the travellers cheerfully took up their journey again, winging on up the stream in search of its source.

#### CHAPTER V

#### THE TURN TO THE LEFT

THEN the fairy and the elf stopped that day for their noon-time rest, Red Cap reminded Nightshade that he had promised that Gripper should "catch" them their dinner.

- "Oh, he can do it, fast enough," said the elf.
- "Then why does n't he?"
- "I have n't told him to yet."
- "Then you 'd better tell him. He has n't brought us a thing, so far. Poor old Buzzfuzz has had to do all the work, and it 's Gripper's turn."

Thus urged, Nightshade turned and with his foot stirred up his bee as it sat beside him. "Hie on, Gripper!" he said. "Hie on, old fellow! Go fetch it."

Gripper spread his wings and started off willingly enough. He came back before long, bringing with him a large fly which he had caught, and laid it at his master's feet.

"A fly!" cried Red Cap with disgust. "No wonder you called it catching us something."

"It ain't bad when it's roasted," said the elf, but he looked ashamed.

### The Turn to the Left

"Maybe not, but I'd rather live on acorns all my life than touch a fly," retorted Red Cap; and, indeed none but the very lowest, poorest class of fairies would ever think of using flies or beetles for food.

Nothing more was said about it. Nightshade, as if by accident, pushed a leaf over the fly so that it lay hidden from sight, and the two companions dined together on bee-bread washed down by an acorn-cup of water, for all the provisions that Mother Peaspod had put up for them were gone. Later on they found a partridge berry, and ate part of that, but it was rather tasteless.

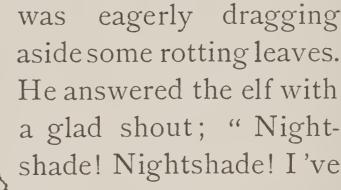
All that day as they journeyed on, the stream kept growing narrower. The forest became more dense and lofty. Instead of grass the ground was now covered with deep emerald green mosses, some as smooth as velvet, some spiked all over with what looked like miniature trees. The ground was sodden and marshy, too.

On account of this dampness the travellers camped for the night in the hollow of an old tree. It was not a very comfortable place, for it was dusty and musty, and Nightshade complained the next morning that he had not slept a wink on account of the stirring of the worms in the rotten wood. This could hardly have been the case,

however, as Red Cap had been awakened two or three times by the elf's snoring.

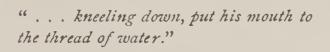
They had two more days of rather uncomfortable travelling. Then on the third morning, Nightshade, who was flying ahead, suddenly stopped. "Why, Red Cap," he called back, "I've lost the stream."

But the fairy had dropped to the ground, and



found it; here's the nutshell."

And, indeed, they had at last reached the source of the stream. Its first



drops trickled, thin and clear, from a hole in the side of a nut which lay almost hidden among the leaves.

Nightshade came hastening back, while Red Cap took off his hat, and kneeling down put his mouth to the thread of water. He drank long and deeply, and then arose wiping his mouth, and drew a long breath. He seemed to have drunk in fresh life and energy with the water. He looked at the

### The Turn to the Left

elf with shining eyes. "Well," he said, "the bird knew what he was talking about. The stream did come from a nutshell. Now the next thing we want to do is to find the two roads."

This was not a difficult task. Not far beyond where they stood was a hedge of tangled bushes and brambles. Nightshade and Red Cap flew to the top of it, and poising on a leaf they looked and looked in silence.

There, indeed, were the two paths starting out from the hedge just as the warbler had said, one leading to the right and one to the left, but how different were those paths.

"Nightshade," said the fairy, after some minutes had passed, "did that bird tell us to take the *right* hand path?"

"If he did he did n't know what he was talking about," answered the elf.

It did, indeed, seem difficult to believe that of the two roads before them any one should dream of taking the one that led to the right when they might choose the other. For the right hand path was a narrow, stony path, so beset with briers, so shut in by branches, that birds, or even fairies, would find it difficult to fly there. There were many places where the two companions would be

obliged to creep between the thorns, and even then it would be at the risk of tearing their wings,—that is, if they took that path.

On the other hand, the way leading toward the left was a broad, smooth road, and very pleasant to the sight. Lights and shadows wavered across it; the branches arched high overhead, and from them were festooned vines bearing strange and brilliant flowers.

"I'm almost sure he said the right hand path," Red Cap murmured thoughtfully.

"And I'm quite sure that if he did he made a mistake. Why, look for yourself. Anyway, I'm not perfectly sure he did n't just tell us to take the right way, not the right hand one, and the one that turns to the left looks as though it were the right one."

Red Cap wavered. "Maybe that was it."

"Anyway, I say to take the one that looks the best. Then if we find it's the wrong one we can always turn back."

That seemed true enough, and after a little more talk Red Cap allowed himself to be persuaded that it would be foolishness to trust themselves entirely to what the warbler might have said instead of to their own common sense.

### The Turn to the Left

"But there's no use standing here arguing about it," cried Nightshade at last. "Follow me, and if it turns out to be the wrong way I'll promise to get you back here all safe." So saying he launched himself from the leaf and flew away down the left hand path, followed, after a moment of indecision, by the fairy.

It was, indeed, a pleasant way that they had chosen. Overhead arched the great green boughs. The air was full of the rich perfume of the flowers. The road, too, led somewhat down hill, and that made the flying all the easier.

After a time, however, the travellers began to tire of the heavy smell of the flowers. It made them feel rather breathless. The sunlight that came between the branches was pale; there was a strange stillness over everything, so that at last Red Cap and Nightshade found themselves talking to each other in whispers, as though they were afraid of being overheard. Not a bird nor butterfly nor living thing was to be seen except the two bees and their own selves.

They had travelled a long distance in this way when the silence was broken by a voice that hailed them. "Hello, you two flying up there, where are you going so fast?"

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They looked around, and there, just back of them and below, stood a tall figure dressed all in gray from top to toe. At first they thought it was a woman, for the garments fell to the feet, but then they saw that what they had taken for a gray scarf wound about her throat was really a filmy gray beard, so they knew it must be a man. It seemed strange they should have flown past without noticing him, though in color he was not unlike the shadows that fell across the path.

"Hello!" answered the elf and the fairy; and Red Cap murmured to Nightshade, "Now we can ask and find out whether we're on the right road."

They flew down, and alighting in the pathway waited for the stranger to catch up with them, which he soon did, walking with long, silent strides.

"We all seem to be journeying in the same direction," he said, as he came up to where they stood. "If you're not in too much of a hurry we might as well trudge on together."

Red Cap answered that they were in a great hurry, and that they had only stopped to ask him whether they were on the right road. That they were journeying out into the world in search of magic, but they had come to a place where two paths started out in different directions, and they

### The Turn to the Left

had not been quite sure which was the better one to take.

"Oh, if it's magic you're in search of," said the stranger, "you couldn't have come to a better place than this. Why, it's almost all magic here. I've never taken the trouble to really study it myself,—had no need to; just living here was enough. It puts magic into everything. Take my cap, for instance." He took it off and handed it first to one and then to the other. "It's only a gray cap, you see, nothing more nor less."

Yes, they saw that.

"Now watch!" So saying, he crumpled up the cap and held it in his two hands, muttering to himself. Suddenly he threw it from him into the air. "Off with you, leather-wings; fly, fly!" he cried; and then the cap was no longer a cap but a great gray bat that circled around and round their heads with noiseless wings, and then flitted away, on down the path before them.

The stranger clapped his hands —

"Bat, bat, Change into a hat,"

he called.

Immediately the leather-wings dropped to the ground, and lay there a motionless gray heap.

The stranger advanced to it, followed by Red Cap and Nightshade, and picked it up. "Nothing but a cap, you see," he said, running his hand up into the peak of it and then putting it on his head.

Nightshade was filled with delight and admiration. "That's a fine trick," he cried. "How do you do it? Won't you show me how?" and he caught his own cap from his head and held it out to the stranger.

But the gray man shook his head. "We don't give lessons for nothing," he said, "even here. Of course if you stay here a long, long time as I have, you'll be able to do it anyway, but if you're in a hurry as you say, we might make a bargain. Give me something to make it worth my while, and I'll teach you all you'll need to know in less than an hour."

The elf's face fell. "But I have n't anything to give," he said. "Nothing in the world but the clothes I stand in and my old bee Gripper. Have you anything, Red Cap?"

The fairy shook his head. He looked doubtfully upon the stranger. There was something about the trick that pleased him but little.

"Surely you must have something," said the gray man. "For instance, what is that thing



" 'No matter why I want it,' he cried, 'but have it I must and shall.'"



### The Turn to the Left

hanging from your neck?" and he pointed to Red Cap's talisman. "It doesn't look like much, but I've taken a fancy to you both, and if you give me that trinket I'll show you the greatest magic that I know."

"Good!" cried Nightshade clapping his hands.
"You'll do it, won't you, Red Cap?"

But the fairy clasped his talisman with a startled look. "No, no," he said. "I cannot part with this."

"But, Red Cap, just think! To learn all the magic we want when we've really barely started! And then we can go straight home again, and how surprised every one will be."

Red Cap only shook his head. "I can't give up my talisman."

"But when you know magic you can make yourself another talisman," said the stranger smoothly. "A hundred of them if you like."

A bright idea struck the fairy. "Then why don't you make one for yourself? Why should you want mine?"

At that the smile left the stranger's face. It grew dark and threatening. "No matter why I want it," he cried, "but have it I must and shall. Will you give it me in fair exchange, or must I

take it from you?" and he shot out a lean and shadowy hand toward the talisman.

Nightshade shrank back with a cry, but Red Cap only grasped the jewel tighter. "Neither," he cried. "It's mine and you shall not have it."

At that the stranger clapped his hands, and immediately from all around, from trees, from rocks and bushes, came hurrying a great multitude of shadowy figures, all dressed in long gray garments like the stranger's. Before the two travellers could think of taking to their wings, they were surrounded and overshadowed by the tall figures. "Take that from him," cried the stranger fiercely, pointing to the talisman that shone on Red Cap's breast.

"Oh, Red Cap, give it to him! Give it to him!" cried Nightshade, in wild terror. "Let him have it."

"No, I will not," cried the fairy. "I will never give it up."

Something dark seemed to come over his eyes. Then in a twinkling all was clear again. Red Cap and Nightshade stood alone in the forest. They looked about them, scarcely believing their own eyes. Gone was the stranger; gone were all the

# The Turn to the Left

gray figures. There was nothing left to show that they had ever been there. "Wh—where have they gone?" stammered Nightshade.

Before Red Cap could answer from around the turn of the road before them came a sound of music, sweet and gay; voices were singing, and then there was a burst of laughter.

The elf caught Red Cap by the hand. "Come! Come!" he cried. "I hear people further on. Let us go find them before the gray man comes back to catch us again."

The fairy was nothing loath, and, spreading their wings, the two flitted swiftly away from the spot and on down the path, still deeper into the forest.

#### CHAPTER VI

#### MORE MAGIC

ED CAP and Nightshade flew without pausing, until a sudden turn brought them out into an open glade, hedged about with flowering bushes.

The centre of this glade was worn quite bare of grass, and on this bare space a number of little gnome-like figures were whirling about in a dizzy dance. They held hands and danced in a circle about a tall and beautiful woman, whom Red Cap knew, from the crown upon her head, to be a queen. The queen was smiling at them and beating time to their dance with a wand which she held, and from which the music seemed to come.

Suddenly her eyes fell upon the two tiny travellers as they hovered in the air watching her. She dropped her wand and the music ceased.

At that the gnomes paused in their dance, and all turned their heads and looked in the direction in which their queen was gazing. Then the circle

# More Magic

broke and the queen came gliding smoothly toward the two travellers, while all the dancers crowded after her in a mass.

As she drew near she beckoned to Red Cap and Nightshade with a sweet smile. "Come hither and tell me who you are who have found us at play in our glade," she said; "and whence do you come?"

"We are an elf and a fairy," answered Red Cap.
"We come from the land beyond the parting of
the ways. We are travelling out into the world
to try to find one who will teach us magic."

"Is it so, indeed?" said the queen, and her voice was very sweet and soft. "We all know more or less of magic here. I myself am not altogether ignorant in the matter. Even now we were about to amuse ourselves with some of it. Come with me and you shall join in our sports."

So saying the queen turned and led the way back to where they had first seen her, followed after a moment of hesitation by Red Cap and Nightshade.

When she reached the bare space in the centre she paused and turned again to the two travellers. "Have you ever played the game of 'Ask for what you wish'?" she inquired.

No, they had never played that.

"It is one of our best magic games," said the queen; "I will show you that first." Then she made all sit down in a big circle, for that was the way the game began.

There was some confusion about getting settled at first, as every one wanted to sit next the travellers, and this was, of course, impossible. At last, however, all were seated on the ground, and then the queen held up her hand for silence.

Red Cap noticed for the first time that she held in her other hand a large gray bag.

When all was still the queen began moving about and stooping here and there to pick up different things from the ground; a stick, a pebble, a dried leaf, a lump of earth,—all sorts of things. These she put in the bag. When it seemed quite full she closed the mouth of it and came over to where Red Cap was sitting. "What would you like to have?" she asked.

Red Cap looked up at her. "What do you mean?" he said.

"I mean, suppose you were going to have a present, anything you would like, what would you ask for?"

Red Cap thought, but he did not seem able to remember any of the things he used to wish he

# More Magic

had. "I wish," he said at last, "that I had a tame cricket all saddled and bridled that I could ride."

"Put your hand in the bag and take it;" and the queen held the mouth of the bag toward him.



"Wondering, Red Cap put in his hand."

Wondering, Red Cap put in his hand and drew out something that felt like a pebble. When he looked at it, however, it suddenly began to grow and come alive. It struggled from his hand, and,

as it touched the ground, it became a handsome glossy black cricket with a tiny golden bridle, and saddled with the very prettiest little golden saddle that ever was seen. It did not seem afraid, but stood there very quietly while Red Cap stroked and patted it. "That is yours," said the queen, smiling again.

Then she turned to the figure sitting next to Red Cap. "Ask what you wish," she said.

"I would like," cried the creature eagerly, "a climbing stick so high I could climb right up to the sky."

"Put in your hand and take it;" and the queen held the mouth of the bag toward him.

He put in his hand, but what he took out was nothing but a dry twig. He cried out with pleasure, however, and looked just as delighted as though he had gotten what he asked for. He stuck one end of it in the ground so that it stood up straight, and then he began to act as though he were climbing up it. At first he seemed to be climbing very fast, and kept looking up. Then he climbed as though he were getting higher. He moved more slowly and cautiously and looked down. Once he stood still and shouted down toward the ground as though he were speak-

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ing to a crowd far below. "Look how high I am! I'm going to climb all the way up to the sky." The others watched him and laughed.

When it was Nightshade's turn he asked for something good to eat. What he drew out was only a piece of dry leaf, but he began nibbling at it with the greatest delight and smacking his lips as though he never had tasted anything quite as good.

So it was with each one in the circle. Some asked for this, some for that. Each put his hand in the bag and drew out something like a stick or a stone, and each acted as though he had got just what he asked for. Those who had not drawn yet looked on and laughed.

The queen glanced back toward Red Cap. "Why don't you take a ride on your cricket?" she asked.

"Well, I think I will," said the fairy.

Putting his leg across the saddle he gathered up the bridle and whisk! away the cricket went with him, swift as the wind and smooth as a dream.

In a moment they were out of the forest altogether. The crowd was left behind. They came out into a little fairy scene. There was a green stretch of grass as smooth as velvet. In the dis-

tance was a fairy lake as bright and still as a piece of looking-glass, and beyond stood a fairy castle all of silver, with domes and turrets that shone against the sky.

Swiftly the cricket sped across the green. He passed the lake. Tiny swans were sailing on it and arching their white necks.

Soon they were close to the palace; so close that, looking up at the windows, Red Cap saw a beautiful little fairy princess leaning from one of them and smiling down at him. She did not look unlike Bluebell, but she was much more beautiful, and she wore a little golden crown upon her head.

Smiling, she kissed her hand to him. "Come, play with me," she cried; "I have been waiting for you so long." Then suddenly she began to laugh and clap her hands.

As she did so a mist came over Red Cap's eyes. He could no longer see clearly. He put up his hands to rub away the mist. He rubbed and rubbed his eyes, and all the while he heard the princess laughing and clapping her hands.

Then he looked about him and gave a gasp. He was sitting in the circle in the forest exactly where he had been before. He was sitting, not on the golden saddle on the cricket's back, but upon a

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dirty pebble, and it was the queen who was looking at him and laughing and clapping her hands. She laughed and laughed until it seemed as though she could hardly stand.

Feeling foolish and ashamed Red Cap slipped hastily from the pebble and looked about him. All around the circle each one seemed as though awakening from a dream; each one seemed ashamed to be caught acting so foolishly.

Nightshade hastily dropped the bit of dried leaf he had been nibbling as though it were hot, and glanced guiltily about to see whether any one had noticed him. Red Cap asked him afterward what he had thought he got from the bag, and he said he had thought it was some delicious sort of a thing called "pie" (he didn't know how he thought of that name for it). It was hot and smelled better than anything he had ever eaten, and it was full of some soft, sweet stuff that oozed out every time he took a bite. He began eating it, and then the next thing he knew the queen was clapping her hands and laughing, and what he was nibbling at was no more nor less than a dried leaf.

So it must have been with each one; each must have thought he drew from the bag just what he asked for.

"And that is the way to play 'Ask for what you wish,' said the queen to Red Cap. Then she stopped laughing. She turned and waved her hand to the rest of the circle. "Now," she said, "we will have a feast. Do you prepare it. And, meanwhile," she went on, again turning to Red Cap and speaking this time to Nightshade as well, "we will sit here until the table is ready, and you shall tell me of how you happened to find your way into this land of enchantments."

Then Red Cap began and told her all about his journey; the queen listened, now and then nodding her head, and now and then looking at him queerly from the corners of her eyes.

When he came to the part about the gray man and how he had tried to get the talisman, the queen's eyes narrowed.

"And so you would not give it up," she said; "that was brave and wise of you. Will you let me see it?" and she held out her hand.

"You may look at it," answered Red Cap, and he held it out toward her, "but I may not take it from my neck. I have been told not to do that until I am safe at home again."

For an instant the smile died away from the queen's face, and she looked at him with a scowl.

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Then she began to smile again, and when she spoke her voice was as soft and silky as ever. "Ah, yes; that also is very wise of you. If you have been told not to take it off you must not think of doing it. But come, now," and she arose; "I see the table is spread, and you must join our feast; you must be both hungry and thirsty after all your journeyings." So saying, she led the way toward the table the gray people had been setting.

Such a feast! the table groaned under the weight of good things; the sweet savor of them filled the air and made Nightshade lick his lips.

The queen seated herself at the head of the table and bade Red Cap sit upon her right, and Night-shade on her left. It was a long table, and after they had taken their places all the others who had been in the game seated themselves also.

At every place was a golden plate and a golden goblet. The queen gave a sign and immediately, without the aid of hands, each one found himself served.

"Eat, my friends," said the queen pleasantly, at the same time raising a morsel to her lips.

Nightshade immediately did the same, but Red, Cap paused as he lifted his hand. The warning of the friendly warbler flashed into his mind, and

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with it came a sudden doubt of the smooth-spoken queen.

Her look was on him and she spoke again. "Why do you not eat? Is our food not to your liking?"

"It is not that," answered Red Cap, "but there was a piece of advice; I was not to eat or drink anything while in the land of enchantment; that is, nothing but what I brought with me from the parting of the ways."

"What foolishness!" cried Nightshade from the other side of the queen.

"No, not foolishness;" the queen spoke reprovingly; "not foolishness if the advice was from one who knew. But I am grieved that you will not share our feast." So saying she began to eat.

Red Cap's mouth watered. He wondered, in spite of what she said, whether he was both foolish and rude to refuse what she offered him. Still the words of the warbler stuck in his mind. He had yet some checkerberries in his scrip. He took one out and began to eat it, but it was dry and tasteless in his mouth, with all those good things before him.

The queen now began to talk to him of magic.

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As he listened to her it seemed to him he had never before heard any one talk so wisely and sweetly.

At last the feast came to an end. The queen made a motion and everything before them was instantly cleared away. Then Red Cap saw that the table was made entirely of glass so clear you could see through it, and of a pale green color.

"I will show you another piece of magic," said the queen.

From the glittering pocket that hung at her side she drew out a pinch of greenish powder and scattered it upon the table, at the same time muttering some magic words.

Immediately the powder began to swirl round and round as though swept by some breath of wind that no one felt. At last it all collected in a little heap before the queen. It lay there quietly for a moment and then it was disturbed, as though something were stirring beneath it.

Presently from the middle of the heap appeared two tiny, tiny green leaves. These rose on a stalk. While Red Cap watched, quite fascinated by the sight, the stalk grew steadily. Other leaves appeared, and then branches. These branches whiteened with blossoms. Then the blossoms fell and

in their place came budding fruit, green at first, but ripening rapidly into a rich and ruddy ripeness.

There stood a little fruit tree all complete.

All the while that this was happening the queen watched the magic in silence, her elbow on the table, her chin in her hand. But when the fruit was ripe she reached out her white arm and



"There stood a little fruit tree all complete."

plucked one of the rosy globes. Breaking it in halves, she handed one part to Red Cap and sank her small teeth in the other. "Is not that magic worth the knowing?" she asked.

The fairy's eyes and thoughts were so full of the wonder of it that, scarcely knowing what he did, he took the part the queen offered him and bit off a piece. It seemed to fairly melt in his mouth with a delicious, unknown flavor.

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Suddenly the warbler's warning rushed back into his mind, but so beautiful and winning was the queen, so delicious the fruit, that he could not believe that any harm would come of it. "This was the right way to come, after all," he assured himself, "and this gracious lady must be the Sun Queen. It would seem too rude for me to refuse her fruit. The warbler said the Sun Queen's magic was harmless." So he swallowed the piece he already had in his mouth, and bit off another.

His eyes were still on the tree, and as he looked and tasted, the queen kept murmuring in his ear something of magic, and of how much she would teach him of it.

After a while the little tree with its glittering fruit began to blur to Red Cap's sight. He could no longer understand what the queen was saying. He turned to her, and her face looked strange and gray; no longer lovely, but curiously like that of the tall stranger he had met on the way.

He was too sleepy to wonder, however; his eyelids weighed like lead. He tried to hold them up, but in spite of himself they closed over his eyes. Then his head fell forward and he sank into a deep sleep.

#### CHAPTER VII

IN THE HOUSE OF THE SHADOW MOTHER

THEN Red Cap awoke, he could not at first think where he was nor what had happened to him.

He sat up and looked about him, and the first thing he saw was the queen. She was sitting and looking at him, her elbow on her knee and her chin in her hand, much as she had sat looking at the magic tree; but the smile was gone from her face now and she looked withered and old.

From her, Red Cap's gaze travelled to Night-shade; he was all sunken together in a little heap, and but half awake.

All this was very different from the last thing that the fairy could remember before he fell asleep. Different, too, was everything around him. All the gray figures who had been there were gone. The forest was no longer gay and bright. A chill wind blew, and at its breath some withered leaves came swirling down from the great branches far above.

"What has happened?" asked Red Cap, pressing his hand to his forehead.

"So you have awakened at last," said the queen, and as she spoke she arose and stood over him. Standing so, she began to grow. She grew, and she grew, and she grew, until at last she was as large as a human being. Red Cap was frightened, and his hand sought his breast for his talisman. It was gone.

"My talisman!" he cried, starting to his feet.
"Where is it?"

"Where, indeed?" asked the queen, or rather the Shadow Mother, for it was she. "Your talisman is now where you will never find it. I took it from you while you slept."

With these words she drew from under her cloak a tumbler made of smoky looking glass. Then, with a swift movement, she stooped and scooped up the two travellers in it, and there they were. She put one hand over the top of the tumbler so that they could not fly out, and lifted it to the level of her eyes. "Now, my bold travellers," she said, "you shall go where you will see much magic. You shall even be a part of it after I turn you to shadows, as I have the others who have come this way."

Then, still holding her hand over the tumbler, she glided away silent and smooth as a shadow, while Buzzfuzz and Gripper buzzed about, trying vainly to get in through the glass to their masters.

On and on went the Shadow Mother, until at last she came to a great gray house. She opened the door and went in, for that was her home.

There she set the tumbler upon a table, and lifting her hand from it she began to draw her fingers across it from one side to the other. She drew them across, and across, and across, many times, and each time she did so her fingers left strands of gray silk, just the way a spider leaves a thread behind him when he weaves. At last the top of the tumbler was closed over with a fine gray web.

Then she dropped her hands at her side. "There!" she said, "I have you safe now," and she turned carelessly away.

The moment she was not looking Red Cap flew up to the web. He thrust his fingers through it and tried to pull its strands apart, but he pulled and struggled in vain; it was as tough as steel.

Dropping down again to the bottom of the tumbler he ran to Nightshade and shook him by the

shoulder. "Up, up, Nightshade!" he cried. "If ever you needed your magic, this is the time. Get us out of this tumbler."

"I don't know any magic," lamented the elf, without raising his head from his knees as he sat all sunken together.

"Why, yes you do," cried Red Cap. "I've seen you use it myself. I saw you work magic on that cocoon so that ever so many things came out of it instead of a moth."

"That was n't magic," answered the elf. "That was going to happen, anyhow."

"But it could n't. What do you mean?"

"Oh, don't you understand?" moaned Nightshade. "I had been watching a caterpillar one day, and a great long-tailed fly came and stung it and left her eggs in it; the caterpillar went on and spun his cocoon, but I knew that those eggs would soon hatch, and then the fly's young ones would eat the caterpillar. Then don't you see they'd come out of the cocoon instead of the moth? It was going to happen, anyway."

"And you really don't know any magic?"

<sup>&</sup>quot;Not a bit."

<sup>&</sup>quot;You were just fooling us?"

<sup>&</sup>quot;Yes."

"Well, then, I think—" Red Cap did not say what he thought. He turned his back on Night-shade and stared out through the side of the tumbler.

At this moment there was a soft knock at the door, and a voice outside called, "Shadow Mother, Shadow Mother, we have brought you a whole load of shadow ravellings. Come out and get them."

The Shadow Mother went to the door and opened it. As she did so several shadow dwarfs (strange, gray little figures) were swept into the room by the draught, just as charred pieces of paper are swept along by the draught of a chimney. One of them clutched the door-jamb and stopped himself there. The others were blown into the room and whirled about, catching themselves on different pieces of furniture. One laid his cobwebby fingers on the edge of the table and clung to it. The Shadow Mother went out without paying any attention to them, and closed the door behind her.

Presently the gray dwarf, who was clinging to the table, saw the tumbler with Red Cap and Nightshade in it. He stared and stared, his goggling eyes growing round with interest. "Come

here, you fellows," he called to the others. "Here're those two little things that were at the feast. She's got them in a tumbler now. Won't they make little bits of shadows, though? Not much use to her, I should think."

The other Shadows began to gather around the table. They moved very slowly and cautiously as though they were afraid they might get blown about again. "Ugh, but this room is full of draughts," remarked one.

They all gathered about the table, staring at the two captives in the tumbler.

"They are little," said another dwarf.

"What do you suppose she's going to do with them?" asked a third.

"Turn them into shadows, of course." It was the first one who spoke.

"Let's stir them up and see them run," said a fourth. With that he stuck his finger right through the web and down into the tumbler. It went through the web just as a shadow would, without breaking it. He poked first Nightshade and then Red Cap with his finger trying to stir them up. His finger itself felt like a web, so soft and clingy.

The elf only gave a howl when the finger [75]

touched him, and crouched the lower, but it made Red Cap feel angry as well as frightened to be poked in that way. He caught the finger in both hands and gave it a hard squeeze.

"Ow! Ow!" piped the shadow, jerking his finger away.



"With that he stuck his finger right through the web and down into the tumbler."

"What's the matter?" cried all the others looking frightened. "Did he bite you?"

"I think he tried to," the shadow answered. He seemed ready to cry.

"Never mind!" said another. He tried to tap on the tumbler, but his finger was too soft to make any noise. "Never mind! Pretty soon

she'll turn them into shadows, and then they can't hurt us."

"She won't turn *me* into a shadow," cried Red Cap boldly, but in his heart he was somewhat afraid. There was no knowing what an enchantress might be able to do with her magic.

"So you think you won't change into shadows?" said the same one. "That's all you know. We thought that once, ourselves, when we were all heavy and real like you. But we ate with her and we drank with her and we did her bidding just the way you will after a while, and then we changed into shadows."

"But it's fine to be a shadow," said the first one.

"A great deal better than it is to be real. You feel so light, and you can stretch up higher than the highest tree. And then we can dance! Look how we dance!" Then all the shadows took hands and began to whirl around the table. Faster and faster they went, each keeping the other in place by holding together, and as they whirled they sang:

"Whirl about
Spin about,
Turn about
In and out.

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Owls may flit Silently; Just as still We can be. Bats that fly In the sky Think we're dreams Gliding by. Fall of foot Never heard, Not a leaf Ever stirred. Bodiless Shades are we Flit, flitting Merrily."

"Is n't that fine?" they cried, stopping as their song ended. "You could n't dance like that."

"No, I could n't."

"It's good to be a Shadow. That is, except when the wind blows," and the Shadow who had spoken glanced around at the others. "Except when the wind blows," they all echoed nodding their shadowy heads.

"Why? What happens then?" asked Red Cap.

"When the wind blows we get blown away," cried one in a sobbing voice.

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"Yes, we get blown away," another took up the tale. "Then the Shadow Mother has to come out and hunt for us, and sometimes she does n't find us all."

"And what happens to the ones she doesn't find?"

"They have to stay where they are, or hide in nooks and crannies until—"

At that moment the door opened again and all the shadows caught hold of the table to keep from being blown away.

The Shadow Mother entered. In her arms was a great heap of shadow skeins and ravellings. She threw them down upon the floor and then looked toward the table with a frown.

"What are you doing here?" she cried to the Shadows. "Away with you, and get to your work. There is plenty to do and not enough Shadows to do it as it is."

Without stopping to speak or answer, away sped the gray figures out through the open door, and the Shadow Mother closed it behind them.

Without a glance at the table where the tumbler stood the enchantress bent over this heap upon the floor, drawing out the long threads, smooth-

ing them, knotting them and winding them on a great shuttle which she had taken up.

When the shuttle was full she opened the door of a great black cavernous closet and drew out a shadowy heap of meshes. This she carefully opened out and hung across the room from hooks, and it proved to be a great net. She was very careful only to touch it with the tips of her fingers and not to get against it.

When it was hung up she took her shuttle and began to work at it, making it larger. A gray, pale light came in through a window, and against this light she moved, vast and indistinct, her hands busy with the net that bellied down with long trailing shreds here and there.

The Shadow Mother kept breathing and murmuring to herself as she moved, and presently she said, "Do you know what I am doing, you over there in the tumbler?" Her voice sounded far away and yet big and all about them like the wind. Red Cap did not answer.

"I'm making a net," the Shadow Witch went on. "I'm making a net out of shadows and magic. When it is once about any one the more they struggle the closer it holds them. After a while, when it's big enough, I'll take it out some night when

the moon is new and its points are sharp. I'll hang my gray net out over the sky. Then, when the Sun begins to rise, he'll find himself caught in it; the more he tries to get free the closer the net will draw, and there he will be. That's what I'll do for the Sun because I hate him. After a while you will hate him, too; and when you turn to Shadows you shall help me weave my net. Won't that be fine?"

As the witch talked her hands moved backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, their shadows sweeping across the tumbler until it made Red Cap dizzy. Then, still working, she began to sing. Her voice sighed and breathed through the room like the breathings of the wind. The fairy could only understand the words now and then, and they did not seem to have much sense, but they gave him a very strange feeling. He felt as though he were growing gray and bodiless, and almost like a shadow himself. The song made him drowsy, too. "This is magic going on, sure enough," he murmured to himself, "but hardly the sort I care to learn."

He tried to keep awake, but before he knew it he found his head bobbing forward.

Suddenly, from the roof overhead, broke forth a

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bold, clear song. The sound of it pierced through Red Cap's drowsiness like the touch of cooling water on his face.

The Shadow Mother must have heard it, too, for her hands ceased from their moving, and she turned her head to listen. Her song sighed away on her lips.

Again came the clear, loud notes. It was a bird singing; singing and singing of sunshine and courage and long flights through the wide and shining sky.

Red Cap sprang to his feet. He seemed filled with hope and energy.

"What is this?" Mhat is this?" muttered the Shadow Mother. "This must not be, or all my enchantment will be sung away."

She swept toward the door and opened it. Quick as a flash a small bird darted in through the opening. He perched on the mantel-piece and cocked his head on one side. Then, watching the witch with his bright eyes, he boldly burst into song once more. His little throat swelled and quivered with the singing.

"Wretched creature!" cried the witch in a rage.
"How dare you come singing of the sunlight in this land of shadows?"

Closing the door she took down a hood from a nail. Holding it in her hands she crept cautiously toward the mantel, and then with a swift movement tried to throw it over the singer. But the bird slipped out from under it, and flying over to a chair perched upon the back and again burst into song.

And now began a chase about the room, the Shadow Mother trying to catch the bird that flitted here and there just beyond reach of her hands.

Red Cap watched them breathlessly. A dozen times he thought she had the songster, and a dozen times it just slipped through her fingers. Suddenly the bird changed its course. It flew directly into the face of the witch. She was so startled that she stepped backward, stumbled and fell against the swaying meshes of the net. The moment she felt it she gave a cry, and tried to beat it off, but it was too late. Like something alive the magic strands flew out to clasp her, twining about her closer and closer. The more she struggled the closer they drew, until at last she fell upon the floor and lay there panting.

But the brown bird flew over to the table. Alighting upon the edge of the tumbler he

stooped over, and with a few strokes of his bill this way and that, he tore the gray web to shreds. Then Red Cap saw that their rescuer was the warbler whose eggs he and Nightshade had saved from the snake.

"Come," cried the bird. "Come out from your prison. I am here to save you."

The elf and the fairy flew up to the edge of the tumbler where he was.

The warbler looked at them keenly. "We have no time to lose," he said. "How do you feel? Are you able to take a long flight?"

"One moment," panted Red Cap. He had found it hard to fly up to the edge of the tumbler even. "I feel so strangely tired." The elf stretched his wings with a groan but did not speak.

The warbler still eyed them. "Yes, you were beginning to feel her magic," he said. "I came just in time. Perhaps you'd better climb up on my back and I'll make shift to carry you, for it is not well for us to linger here."

Red Cap looked down at the Shadow Mother and the net wrapped round and round her. "I should think there was no great haste," he murmured. "She seems safe enough."

"Yes, until her shadows come. But once she

can make them hear they 'll hasten to untangle her and set her free. No, we 'd better run no risks, so up with you."

So urged, Red Cap made shift to fly to the warbler's back, and Nightshade was not slow to follow him.

"I don't see how you're going to get out," said the fairy. "The door is shut and the windows, too."

"There are more ways than that," answered the warbler. "The chimney might do at a pinch."

With the two wee folk on his back the bird flew down into



"The elf stretched his wings with a groan."

the empty fire-place, and looked up. Above was the chimney, wide and black; only a square of light far, far above showed where the opening was.

Nightshade shivered and nestled down among the warm feathers while Red Cap drew a long breath. "Must we go that way?" he asked.

- "I know of no better. Do you?"
- "No, I don't."
- "Then hold fast and away we go." So saying, the warbler spread his wings and flew up into the black tunnel above them.

There was a cold draught in the chimney, and the great bricks, furry with soot, seemed slipping away behind them, so fast they flew up toward the square of light above. The opening overhead seemed to grow in size, and then suddenly they flew through it and came out into the wide free air above. There the warbler lighted on the top of the chimney to rest his wings a moment.

Far below, and vast and endless, lay a gray country with crags and woods and streams. The two travellers craned their necks and looked about them wondering. It was all so gray and silent; nothing but grayness everywhere.

A sudden breath of wind stirred the warbler's feathers. "Good!" he cried. "The wind is astir. If that is so we may take our time, for while it blows her shadows cannot get to her, however she calls."

As if in answer to what the bird said the wind rose in a sudden gust. And now from all about the house, from rocks and trees and bushes came

a sound of voices. "Shadow Mother! Shadow Mother!" they cried; "the wind is rising. Come and catch us before we are blown away." It was the shadows calling to the gray enchantress.

There was no answer; only the rising sigh of the wind. "Shadow Mother, Shadow Mother, we are blowing away," wailed the voices.

And now from the top of the chimney as they looked across the country, Red Cap, Nightshade, and the warbler, saw a curious sight. Hundreds and hundreds of shadows were being blown by the wind across the open country. On they went, whirling and turning and drifting like dead leaves. Sometimes they caught at bushes and grasses with their shadowy hands. They clung for a minute, only to be swept on again, and always sounded their doleful voices: "Shadow Mother, we're blowing away."

Then the gray sky, swept by the wind, began to clear of mists. A pale and watery sunlight broke over the country.

"Now, hold tight," said the warbler, and he launched himself out into the wide, windy air.

#### CHAPTER VIII

THE ELF AND THE FAIRY REST FOR A WHILE

N and on flew the warbler, dipping and flitting through the air with wings that never seemed to tire.

Red Cap and Nightshade lay at length, nestled down among his feathers. The feathers were smooth and slippery on top, but underneath they were downy soft, with hard quills where they came through the skin. The fairy and the elf lay with their heads toward the warbler's tail, and the feathers covered them up to their chins. The wind whistled past their ears the bird went so fast.

At last, after the warbler had gone a long distance, he alighted upon the limb of a tree.

"Well, here you are at last," said a familiar voice. "I began to think something must have happened to you. But what under the sun is the matter with your back? The feathers are all of a hump."

# Elf and Fairy Rest for a While

Red Cap sat up and looked about him. As he had thought it was the warbler's mate who was talking.

She gave a shrill cheep as she saw him. "No wonder you looked humpy," she cried. "Have you the other one, too?"

"Yes; both of them." The bird turned his head as though on a pivot and looked backward. "Up, lazy one," he piped, and gave himself a shake.

Then Nightshade too sat up, and after a moment followed Red Cap who had already slipped from the sparrow's back to the branch of the tree.

The two companions stood there feeling very weak and shaky. The lady warbler looked at them with her head on one side. "They don't look very well," she remarked.

"No," answered her mate. "You see they were in the Shadow Mother's house breathing in magic all the time. It's lucky I got to them when I did. A little more and they'd have become shadows."

The mother warbler gave her tail a jerk. "Dear knows we've had a long enough journey in search of them. I hope they feel grateful to you."

"We do; oh, we do!" cried Red Cap. He sat down on a lump of bark as he spoke, for he felt too weak to stand any longer.

"That's all right," said the warbler. "You helped us when we were in trouble, and turn and turn about's fair play. But it's a good thing this wind keeps blowing. I see you'll both have to rest here for a while before you're fit to travel further."

"But how did you find them?" asked the mother warbler.

Then her mate told her all about it and she listened admiringly. "Well, you're clever enough," she said, as he ended. Then she asked, "But don't you think there's any danger of the Shadow Mother's coming after them?"

"No, not as long as this wind keeps up, nor for some time after, either. As I told you she can't free herself, and the shadows have blown so far that even after the wind drops it'll take them some time to get home again."

The mother warbler cocked her head and looked about her. "If we're going to be here any time at all had n't we better begin building a nest? We could make it more comfortable for the wee creatures, and besides, I do like to have a nest around where I can go to if I feel like it."

"Yes, I think that would be a good plan," said

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# Elf and Fairy Rest for a While

the warbler. "I'll begin to gather some sticks directly."

Red Cap suggested that he and Nightshade could creep into some crack and shelter themselves there, but this the birds would not hear of. The mother bird particularly would not believe that the two could make themselves comfortable outside of a nest, and set to work busily to build one.

Red Cap offered to help the warblers in their labors, but this they would not allow. They said he must rest, and then, besides, he did not know how to build.

That day while the two birds were busy over the new home, and Red Cap and the elf were sitting and watching them languidly, Buzzfuzz and Gripper appeared. The travellers were very glad to see their faithful bees. They had been afraid they were lost, or that the Shadow Mother would manage somehow or other to keep them prisoners.

By night the frame of the nest was well begun, but not enough finished for the fairy and the elf to sleep in it. They were obliged to take shelter in a crack in the tree and very uncomfortable they found it.

The next day the warblers were up early and at their work.

All day the wind blew softly, keeping the great leaves astir with a pleasant sound. The bees buzzed away out of sight, returning now and then;



"The travellers were very glad to see their faithful bees."

but Red Cap and Nightshade had not energy to do anything but lie stretched in the pale sunlight that flickered on them with the dancing of the leaves.

That night they spent in the nest and the next day it was so far completed that it was very soft

# Elf and Fairy Rest for a While

and cosy, lined with stray feathers or bits of down that the warblers had found here and there.

Red Cap wondered how the birds were able to leave their own home nest and their eggs. When he asked about it the father bird told him to his amazement that many weeks had passed since the adventure with the snake instead of only a few days. The eggs had hatched long ago; the young ones had learned to fly and were now out in the world, shifting for themselves.

It is, indeed, quite impossible to judge of time when one is in the midst of enchantment.

"But what made you think of coming to look us up?" asked Red Cap.

"Well, I felt sort of anxious about you," the father bird confessed, "from the time I heard what you were after." Then with a glance toward Nightshade who was lying stretched out on a cobweb some distance away, the warbler added in a lower tone, "The fact is I did n't like the looks of your companion over much. He looked to me like one that might lead you into mischief, so as soon as the children were off our claws I said to my mate that I thought I'd just fly to the parting of the ways to try for news of you. Then nothing would do but she must come with me."

"Well, we inquired all along the way," the bird continued, "but no one seemed able to tell me anything about you. We flew quite a distance up the right-hand road without hearing anything of you, and then I made up my mind you must have taken the wrong turning."

Red Cap hung his head in shame. "It was so much pleasanter looking that we thought you must have made a mistake. We wanted to think you had."

"Ah, well," said the warbler, with a keen glance at the fairy, "it's all come out well enough. I made up my mind very soon after I started down this road that I was on your track. I guessed by the way the shadows moved and whispered that the enchantress was busy turning some one into a shadow."

Red Cap told him of the gray man they had met on the way; the one who had advised him to throw away his talisman. The warbler nodded. "Yes," he said, "that's the way with the Shadow Mother; she can take any shape she chooses, and if she can't get people into her power in one way she generally can in another."

For some time the birds and the wee folk rested quietly where they were, the elf and the fairy grow-

# Elf and Fairy Rest for a While

ing stronger and more able to be about all the time, and all the time the wind blew. The mother warbler began to talk of beginning their homeward journey. "It must be getting near the time of falling leaves," she said; "full time for us to be thinking of turning southward."

The father bird said little, but always there was some reason for further delay. "We're strong enough now to make a start at any rate," Red Cap suggested. "It seems to me we're only wasting time. You feel all right now, don't you, Nightshade?"

"Better," and Nightshade stretched his wings, but not strong the way I used to be."

The fact was the elf was growing fat and lazy, and would have been willing to spend all his time swinging in a spider's web, dozing the hours away, or munching on a handful of bee-bread. The fairy, however, made him take a short flight every day just to strengthen his wings. His naps through the day did not keep Nightshade awake at night. He always fell asleep the moment he was cuddled in the nest.

The evening after this talk Red Cap, for some reason or other, could not get to sleep. For one thing he had been worrying over his lost talisman.

He could not bear the thought of going home and telling his grandfather he had lost it, — the grandfather who had kept it ever since he was a boy. Then, besides, it might prove almost necessary to the fairy on his journey, for he had still far to go, and many dangers to meet, for all he knew.

This worrying kept him awake long after he could tell by Nightshade's breathing that the elf was fast asleep.

Suddenly he heard the mother bird who was perched with her mate on a branch close by give a peep. Then he heard the father bird speak. "Are n't you asleep yet?" the warbler asked, taking his head from under his wing.

"No I'm not. I was just thinking—" she paused.

"Thinking what, my dear?"

"Oh, I'm getting anxious to be home again. I was thinking of the children; I'm afraid they will be starting south, and I was in hopes we all might have made the journey together. Then, besides, the wind has n't been blowing so steadily to-day. I was thinking if it should stop we might have trouble with the Shadow Mother yet."

There was a pause and then the warbler said in [96]

# Elf and Fairy Rest for a While

a lower tone, "Well, I should n't be so sorry if the wind were to drop."

"Why not?" asked the mother quickly. "I thought it was the wind that kept the shadows from going to untangle the witch?"

"So it is, but there are other things the wind is doing besides that."

"What do you mean?"

"Have you noticed that all the time it's been blowing away from the Shadow Mother's house?"

"Yes; I've noticed that."

"Well, it's blown all the mists and shadows and everything to the very edge of her land and between us and the parting of the ways. There they're banked up so thick and dark we could n't pretend to find our way through them. I should n't even like to try. We might get lost in them and starve to death before we got out. That's why I'm waiting now."

"But in that case it may be deep winter before we get back," cried the mother bird.

"Yes, I've thought of that, too, but we can't help it."

There was silence. Then the father bird gave a mournful peep. "If that fairy had not lost his

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talisman we'd have been all right. It would have shown us the way back in spite of the shadows."

"But are you sure he has lost it? Have you asked him?"

"No need of that. He never would have gotten into this plight in the first place if he had had it."

At this Red Cap started up. The warblers heard him stir. "Hush!" breathed the father bird. "I'm afraid we'll waken them; no need for worrying them about it, too."

After that there was silence. The two birds tucked their heads under their wings, and the night grew very quiet except for the breathings of the wind that was still astir.

But there was no sleep for Red Cap. His heart was beating hard and fast. So it seemed that his heedlessness of warnings had not only brought trouble on himself, but had drawn those good, kind birds into it as well.

Almost all night he lay awake, or if he slept it was only a short and troubled doze. The next morning he ate little or no breakfast. The mother bird was troubled about him. "You have n't got rid of all the magic yet," she said. "You'd better keep quiet to-day and rest in the sun."

The father warbler, on the other hand, thought

# Elf and Fairy Rest for a While

he needed exercise. "He'd better take a good long flight in the wind," he remarked, "then he'll come back feeling better and ready for dinner."

"I believe father warbler's right," said the fairy.
"I think a flight might do me a world of good."

"I'd go with you," called Nightshade lazily from the spider-web hammock near by, "but I'm not feeling very well myself." The fact was he had over-eaten, himself, the day before.

Red Cap was very glad that the elf was too lazy to join him. He wanted to go alone for what he had on hand. He had made up his mind that he would fly to the wall of mist and shadows, and try whether it was indeed impossible to see his way through it. He did not want to say anything to anyone about it, however, until he had made the attempt.

With this idea in his head he started off from the nesting-tree, flying along with apparent aimlessness as long as he was within sight of the birds. Sometimes he stopped to swing up and down on a grass blade, sometimes he paused to rest on a twig or leaf. But as soon as he was out of sight he began to travel very differently, flying fast and steadily and always in the one direction,—the direction in which the wind was blowing.

At first all was as clear and bright as when he was near the nest, but presently he noticed that even the pale sunlight of that country had faded away. Then in sheltered places, behind rocks and in tree hollows, he began to see shadows crouching.

Suddenly and almost before he knew it, he found himself rushing into a still grayness. He could hardly see his hand before his face. It would be perfectly impossible not to lose one's way in that twilight of mist and shadow.

Red Cap stopped perfectly still where he was. Very carefully he turned until he faced in an exactly opposite direction, his face where his back had been. Then he flew straight forward, and very soon found himself back at the edge of the mist with the open country before him.

"Well, clearly that won't do," said the fairy, drawing a deep breath. "It won't do to venture in there again without some clue to lead me out in case I get lost."

He looked about him wondering what he could find, and presently close by he saw a deserted spider's web. "The very thing," cried Red Cap, clapping his hands.

Flying to the web he dropped down and began examining it. After a time he found the place

# Elf and Fairy Rest for a While

where the silk thread, of which it was woven, began. Then he commenced to unravel the web, winding the thread around a twig as he untangled it. At last the web was all unravelled, and he held

in his hands a ball of spider thread, gray, shining, and as big as his two fists.

It was too large for him to carry in his pocket, so he took off his cap and hid the ball in it.

He had been so long over unravelling the web that he decided not to try the mist bank again that day. He was afraid the warblers might grow anxious and come to look for him.



"Fasten his thread to a sturdy frond of fern."

He spent the afternoon in coaxing Nightshade to exercise his wings a little, and the next morning he told the mother bird he felt so much better for his trip of the day before that he meant to take another.

She made no objections, so settling his cap firmly on his head away he flew.

It did not seem so far to the wall of mist that day for he knew the way. He was careful not to fly into it this time, but, stopping on its edge, he looked about him for something to fasten his thread to. This he soon discovered in a sturdy frond of a fern.

He tied his thread about the stem, knotting it safely, and then, ball in hand, he began flying straight before him into the mist, unrolling the clue as he went. In case he lost his way he could always follow the thread back to where he started.

#### CHAPTER IX

#### THE LOST TALISMAN AGAIN

S soon as Red Cap entered the mist he lost sight of everything in the grayness. He had nothing to go by, and could only guess at whether he was going straight forward or only round in a circle. However, he held fast to his clue and went forward as best he could, trusting to luck.

Sometimes he would come to a place where the mists were thinner, and he could make out something of his surroundings. Sometimes through the grayness would loom up dark gigantic figures that seemed to nod and beckon to him, but as he came closer to them they showed out to be only bushes, or tall clumps of withered grass; they were always hung with drops of water like rows of pearls from the moistness of the mist.

From all about him sounded at times the sighs or breathing of the shadows that lurked there in crevices of rocks, or tangles of branches. The

larger of these shadows took no notice of him, but sometimes the smaller ones — those scarce bigger than himself — caught at him with their shadowy fingers, begging him to take them with him, or to carry them out of the mists into the open again.

This, however, Red Cap could not do. "Wait; you'll have to wait," he would answer. "When the wind changes you'll blow back to where you want to go, but if I took you with me you'd only get deeper into the grayness."

After wandering about for a long time Red Cap suddenly came to a place where the mist was thinner than it had been at all. He could see about him for some distance.

There seemed a strangely familiar look about the place. It was an open space set round with immense trunks of trees that stood almost in a circle.

Then, suddenly, Red Cap knew where he was. This was the very spot where he played the game of "Ask for what you wish," and where he had sat at the feast with the enchantress; he thought he could even tell the exact spot where he had been sitting when he ate of the magic fruit that had made him go to sleep.

# The Lost Talisman Again

If this were really the place, he ought to be able to find the path by which they had reached it.

He spread his wings, which were somewhat heavy from the dampness, and flew slowly around the circle, watching carefully for any signs of a path, but he could find none.

After a time his flight brought him under an ash tree, and from the branches above came a doleful sound of wailing. Looking up Red Cap saw that a shadow had caught upon one of the lower branches and was clinging there, and swaying about very much as a wet shirt hangs and sways from the clothes-line on a washing day.

As it swayed about there the shadow was talking to itself in a sobbing voice. The fairy could even make out what it was saying: "Ow! Ow! I can't get down; no, I can't; Shadow Mother, Shadow Mother, why don't you come and find me? Oh, I'm afraid my arms will tear off if I don't get down."

Red Cap hovered below the shadow listening, and then he flew up nearer. "Why don't you let go if you're afraid your arms will tear?" he said. "It would n't hurt you to fall, you're so light."

"No, but I wouldn't fall. I'd blow away and dear knows where I'd get to. I only just hap-

pened to catch here, anyway. I was going so fast. Why don't you blow away?"

"I'm not a shadow. I'm heavy; just feel me," and Red Cap flew up and laid his hand on the shadow's fingers.

"Oh, yes you are. You're heavy. Oh, please help me down. Won't you?"

Red Cap hesitated. "I don't know how I could;



and anyway
I don't know
whether I
want to;"
for he remembered
what the
warbler had
said about

the shadows setting the Shadow Mother free.

"Oh, yes! Why don't you want to?" wailed the shadow. "I never did you any harm. I only just poked my finger at you and then you squeezed it; yes, you did, and you hurt me, too."

At that Red Cap looked at the shadow again, and recognized him. "Why, you're the shadow that poked your finger in the tumbler at the Shadow Mother's house, are n't you?" he cried.

# The Lost Talisman Again

"Yes, and I sat near you when we played 'Ask for what you wish;' you know me; won't you help me down?"

"No, I don't believe I will. I know what you 'd do. You 'd go back to the Shadow Mother just as fast as ever you could. I 'm going to let you stay here. Good-bye."

"Oh, don't go, don't go," shrieked the shadow in its soft, weak voice. "Wait a minute." Then he added slily, "If you'll help me down maybe I can tell you something you'd like to know."

"What could you tell me?"

"Oh, something. How would you like to know"—then the shadow sank its voice to a whisper—"how would you like to know what became of that bright thing you wore about your neck?"

"My talisman!" cried the fairy eagerly. "Oh, if you'll tell me where that is I'll do anything in the world to get you down. Do you truly know?"

"I know well enough, for I saw all the old mother did while you were asleep, and I'll tell you, too, only you must get me down first, and how can you do that?"

"Yes, how can I do it? Let me think," said the fairy. He fell into a brown study while the

shadow watched him anxiously. At last he spoke. "I might sit on your shoulder and then when you let go, my weight might carry us both to the ground together."

"I'm afraid you're not heavy enough; we might both be blown away."

A bright thought struck Red Cap. "Have you any pockets?" he asked.

"Yes; two on each side."

"How would it do for me to fill them with pebbles so as to make you heavy?"

The shadow looked dubious. "That *might* do, if they didn't fall through me."

"We'll try, anyhow."

Red Cap flew down and found that luckily there were a great many pebbles scattered about on the ground. He was a strong fairy for his age, though not as strong as Nightshade. He found he could lift in his arms a pebble almost twice as large as a pea and still manage to fly.

He carried the pebble up through the air to where the shadow was hanging and carefully placed it in one of the pockets. He was very careful about putting it in lest it should fall right through, for the shadow did not look very thick or firm. However, the pebble stayed there.

# The Lost Talisman Again

Then the fairy flew down and fetched another pebble.

This he did again and again and again, putting them in the shadow's pockets until he felt they were as full as they would stand without tearing.

"I can't hold on any longer," cried the shadow at last, "I'm growing so heavy."

"Then let go; I think you're heavy enough to fall now."

The shadow loosened his hold on the branch and down he fell, lighting on the ground with such a thump that he sat there quite still and dazed for a while.

"And now quick," cried Red Cap, "tell me what became of my talisman."

"Your talisman?" said the shadow stupidly. Then he seemed to gather his wits together. "Oh, yes; that shining thing. Well, after you went to sleep the Shadow Mother took it from your neck. You knew that?"

"Yes; and what next?"

"Well, of course she was in a hurry to get rid of it, for it was so bright that if she had held it long it would have burned right through her, and she would have melted, you know; so she threw it away."

"Where did she throw it?"

"She threw it in a spring of water over there," and the shadow pointed toward the west of the glade; "and as far as I know there it is still."

Red Cap did not pause to hear anything further. He did not even stop to pick up his ball of thread which he had put down while he was carrying the pebbles. Spreading his wings he flew like a flash in the direction in which the shadow had pointed.

In less than a minute he found himself at the border of the glade, and there, in among towering fronds of ferns he caught the glint of water.

He flew down and knelt upon its brink. The water was almost black, though clear, and where the fairy dipped his fingers in it he found it as cold as ice.

But there was no mistake about his talisman; it was there; the shadow had spoken truly. He could see it shining up through the water so brightly that it made a flickering spot of light upon the ferns, just as though a sunbeam were shining from below instead of above. But it was quite out of reach. Red Cap threw himself flat upon the bank and plunged his arms down through the water up to the shoulders, but he could not begin to touch it.

# The Lost Talisman Again

He drew back shuddering with the cold. When the water had splashed upon his lips it had tasted as bitter as death. What was he to do? There lay the talisman so plainly to be seen and yet so hopelessly out of reach, for fairies do not know how to swim. Perhaps it is on account of their wings that they never think of learning. They have a great dread of getting under water.

But as Red Cap stood gazing mournfully down through the clear black depths, a very daring plan came into his mind. It was so very daring that he was frightened and tried to think of something else, but always that plan came back into his mind as the only way.

At one place the bank shelved down less steeply, directly to where the talisman lay. Red Cap's thought was that if one could hold his breath long enough he might walk down that slope to the talisman, pick it up and walk out again. But how, if one were to lose one's breath, or be so chilled by the water that one would fall down and be drowned?

The fairy had a bold heart, but it took all his courage to think of risking it. Still, that is what he did at last decide to do.

Taking a long breath of the free air he stepped down into the water. It was so bitterly cold it made him gasp, but on he went. The water grew deeper. It was up to his waist; up to his chin; he drew a fresh breath and went on. Over his mouth; he closed his eyes. Over his head.

Then the fairy did not feel so cold. He opened his eyes and found he could see quite clearly, and there, only a step before him, lay the talisman.

He stooped and picked it up and then turned and walked up the slope and out upon the bank in the wide air again.

Red Cap stood for a few moments hardly knowing where he was or what had happened. Scarcely thinking of what he was doing, he put the chain about his neck and dropped the talisman upon his breast once more.

Immediately a pleasant warmth filled all his chilled limbs. A glow seemed about him, as though a spot of summer sunlight had fallen upon him in the midst of the mist. The light and warmth were from the talisman.

Red Cap was suddenly filled with a wonderful sense of delight and lightness.

He leaped into the air with a laugh of pure joy

# The Lost Talisman Again

and then away he flew, more swiftly and tirelessly than he had ever flown before.

There was no need now for the spider-thread clue. The talisman burned through the mists before him showing him the way. On every side the shadows shrank back whispering "Look! Look! The fairy with the talisman!"

Very soon he came out of the mist at the very spot where he had entered it, and within a few minutes' flight of the nesting tree.

"Where in the world have you been?" called the warbler, as Red Cap came flying home to the nest. "We've been looking for you everywhere. I began to be afraid you might have ventured into the mist bank and got lost."

"Did you?" asked Red Cap in a joyous voice. He kept his talisman hidden in his hand so the warbler did not see it.

Nightshade, who was sitting on a twig smoothing his wings, and working them up and down, gave the fairy a sharp look.

Mother Warbler was bustling busily about below, picking up a dinner. "Now you've come you'd better sit right down and make a good meal,"

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she called to the fairy. "We've no time to waste."

"No, there's no time to waste," the Father Warbler echoed.

"Why? What's the hurry?"

"We've decided we'd better not wait here any longer. Whether the wind blows or whether it does n't it's bad for us. It's bad either way. We must try to make our way through to the other side whatever happens. Of course it's a risky thing. We may get lost there, but Mother Warbler thinks we'd better make a try at it."

"Yes, that 's what I think," and the mother flew up beside them. She stared hard at Red Cap. "What's the matter with you? What makes you smile that way? It's not a smiling matter, I can tell you," she spoke somewhat peevishly.

"Well," answered Red Cap still smiling, "you see I don't think it's going to be such a very dangerous matter."

"You don't? I'd like to know why not." This from the Father Warbler.

"Because — because — well, because I have my talisman again," and then Red Cap drew away his hand so that they could all see it shining upon his breast.

# The Lost Talisman Again

"You've found it," cried Nightshade, springing to his feet, while the birds burst into triumphant cries of joy.

"Yes, I've found it, and now we can travel back to the parting of the ways just as soon as we choose, for it will clear a path before us however thick the mists may be."

Of course the warblers and Nightshade wanted to hear all about how the talisman had been found. They listened breathlessly to Red Cap's story, and when he had ended the Father Warbler spoke: "You have been brave and strong, but I knew from the first moment I laid eyes on you that you would be worth something in the world;" and even his mate had words of praise for the brave fairy, who, if he had done wrong, had had the courage to set it right again.

There was now no reason why they should not start at once and travel in as leisurely a manner as they chose. Even the Shadow Mother would have no terrors now that Red Cap had his talisman again.

Before long the four were on their way, winging through the mist that divided before them as the light of the talisman fell upon it; and always the path of light led them in the right direction.

Long before dark they were all once more at the parting of the ways, and well out of the Shadow Mother's country.

And now the elf and the fairy were ready to begin anew, and the warbler was there this time to see that they made no mistake about taking the right direction.

#### CHAPTER X

# RED CAP AND NIGHTSHADE TRAVEL TOWARD THE RIGHT

"Solution of the father and the said the father bird. "There's the road before you; the one you should have taken before, and then you would not have had all that trouble."

"It looks very rough," Nightshade remarked doubtfully. He almost felt as though he had had enough of it, and would be willing to give up the magic and turn back. But Red Cap had a braver heart. "It can't be as dangerous as the other way, anyhow," he said.

"You'll find this path gets easier as it goes on," said the warbler. "We'll watch you till you get through the thorns."

"But I thought you were coming with us?" cried Red Cap, with some dismay.

"No, indeed. We must be starting for the South, my mate and I. But you won't find any

dangers. Just follow the path and you'll find the Sun Queen safely enough."

"What bothers me, though," said the fairy, "is how we're to know her when we do find her. I did n't know the Shadow Witch."

"Yes, but this is different. When you've once seen the Sun Queen you'll know. Besides, she wears the master talisman upon her breast."

"And does it look like my talisman?"

"No, but your talisman looks like it; and when you meet her do not fear her but do whatever she bids you; no harm will come to you."

It was hard to bid good-bye to the friendly birds, but Red Cap could see that they were anxious to set off on their own journey, and he and Night-shade had wasted enough time as it was. So the last word was said, and the two comrades started, winging their way toward the barrier of thorns they saw before them.

It was only a short distance that they could fly. As soon as they reached the brambles they were obliged to fold their wings and creep along through them from one twig to another as best they could. They were obliged to keep close down to the ground in order to follow the turnings of the path which they would otherwise have lost.

# Red Cap and Nightshade Travel

They did not know for how long they toiled along followed by their bees that crept through the spaces after them. It seemed an endless time. They grew weary and their clothes were scruffed and torn. No one but fairies or insects could have made their way through such a thorny tangle.



"No one but fairies or insects could have made their way through such a thorny tangle."

All about them was a silence broken only by their scratching over the twigs, their heavy breathing, or now and then the buzzing of one of the bees.

At last the fairy rose and stood his full height on a thorn, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"There! We're out of the worst of it," he said. "But it has been a hard road to travel."

"Not worth the pains, I say," and Nightshade looked ruefully at his scratched hands and one knee that showed through a three-cornered rent in his breeches.

"Oh, but think of all the magic we'll learn," cried the fairy hopefully. "That'll make it more than worth while."

"Maybe so," said Nightshade doubtfully.

The worst of the journey was past, as Red Cap said.

From that point on the two travellers took to their wings, flitting down the path that widened steadily before them. Great branches arched overhead. The sunlight shone through them, changing them to a vast roof of golden green. Where it shone upon the leaves beneath it burnished them like silver.

The companions caught glimpses between the tree-trunks of an open country beyond. Then they heard a cock crow in the distance. They had never heard one before and wondered what it was, but it sounded homey and comfortable to their ears.

Suddenly they came out from the forest and [ 120 ]

# Red Cap and Nightshade Travel

saw above them the vast arch of the open sky.

The elf and the fairy, who had travelled little and had lived deep in the forest, had never seen the open country before, nor such a great sweep of sky. It almost took away their breath. They had never before felt just how small they were: mere pin-pricks in the vastness.

Beyond the meadows the hills were hazy, and all the world seemed a wonderful soft color, golden, brown, and red, for summer was over.

The path had ended with the forest.

"Now, what are we to do?" queried Red Cap, resting himself on the twig of a wild rose-bush close by. "Which way ought we to turn? The warbler didn't tell us about the path ending."

As he clung there, looking about him he became conscious of two bright spots shining in the sky over toward the east. He wondered he had not noticed them before.

Then as he looked he saw that those daytime stars were the lights in two mild, blue eyes. They were the eyes of a great face dimly showing in the sky. "Look!" the fairy whispered to Nightshade, who had lighted on a leaf close by. "It is the Sun Queen."

In awestruck silence the two companions gazed, while in the sky before them a great figure slowly shaped itself against the blue. It was the figure of a beautiful woman dressed in a blue garment that fell from her neck to her feet.

She looked at the two tiny travellers and smiled, and then she came toward them, stepping from hill to hill.

As she came nearer, curiously enough, instead of looking larger she seemed to be growing smaller.

At first she was so great she seemed as high as the sky; then she shrank to the height of a giant; then to that of a human, and by the time she had crossed the last meadow, and stood face to face with the fairy and the elf, she was scarcely taller than Red Cap himself.

"I saw you coming," she said. "I saw you far away at the parting of the ways. So you want to learn magic of me?"

"Yes, we do if you will teach us," answered Red Cap.

His fingers touched his talisman where it hung. The Sun Queen also wore a talisman, just as the warbler had told him. The folds of her garment were drawn across it, but it was so wondrously



"A great figure slowly shaped itself against the blue."



# Red Cap and Nightshade Travel

bright that it shone through the blue, and could be seen even as to its shape, which was round. Red Cap could tell that if there had not been something over it he would not have been able to look at it on account of its brightness.

"Yes," the Sun Queen answered him, "I will teach you magic if you will come with me."

"We will come with you," said Red Cap, and Nightshade nodded his head.

"Will you, indeed?" The Sun Queen smiled. "It takes a brave heart to do that, and yet if you will follow where I lead nothing shall harm you."

So saying she turned and walked toward the south, the elf and the fairy following her. Presently she turned into the forest, and her two companions saw in front of them a great hedge barring the way. Its leaves had been touched by frost so that they were all red. At least that was what the two travellers thought at first, but as they drew nearer, the hedge had a very curious look. They began to doubt whether it was a hedge at all. A strange roaring sound came from it. A little further and Nightshade gave a cry and stopped short. Red Cap, too, paused. The hedge was indeed a hedge, but it was of living fire instead of harmless leaves.

The fire wavered and leaped and glowed, but it did not burn the trees or bushes around it, and it always was straight and smooth like a wall,—a great wall that towered higher than the trees. The tiny fairy could hardly see the top of it.

When Red Cap and Nightshade stopped the Sun Queen did not pause nor turn her head, but she said, "Follow me." Then they followed her.

When they were quite close to the wall of fire the queen turned to them and spoke again. "This is my home. Remember what I said. Keep a brave heart and nothing here shall harm you—neither fire nor water. Will you come with me into my house?"

At that moment Red Cap's heart was anything but brave, but he gazed at her talisman and thought of the warbler's words. Then he looked into her eyes and he could not doubt her. He laid his hand in hers. "I will go with you even through the fire," he said.

But Nightshade shrank back, whimpering. "No, no;" he cried. "I don't want to learn magic. I'm afraid. I'm going home."

"What, would you turn back after coming so far?" asked the Sun Queen.

"Yes; yes I would. I never did care much

## Red Cap and Nightshade Travel

about magic, anyway; and don't you go, either, Red Cap. You'll get hurt."

"I'm not afraid," answered the fairy. And indeed as soon as he had laid his hand in the Sun Queen's his heart seemed filled with high courage so that he feared nothing.

"Then let us go," said the queen, and hand in hand they walked straight up to the fire.

Nightshade gave a cry. "Come back! Come back!" he called, but Red Cap did not turn his head.

As the queen and the fairy reached the fire it parted before them like a doorway, and through this opening they walked calmly and unharmed, and then the flames closed together again and Nightshade found himself alone in the forest, with nothing but the leaping fire for company.

#### CHAPTER XI

#### NIGHTSHADE COMES HOME AGAIN

N a hollow of a dead tree an old elf woman sat all alone spinning. She was so old that her face was brown and her skin as wrinkled as a walnut. The sound of her spinning-wheel could be heard at the knot-hole like the continuous buzzing of a bee.

Presently the light that came in through the knot-hole was darkened. The old elf looked up and saw a figure standing in the opening, black against the light outside. "Who's that?" she asked in a querulous voice.

"It's I, Nightshade, Grandmother. Don't you know me?" And that elf himself stepped into the hollow.

"Nightshade!" and the wrinkled spinner dropped her hands in her lap. "And what wind is it blows you hither?"

"Is that all the welcome you have for me?" asked Nightshade throwing himself down upon a piece of

bark that had been arranged at one side of the room as a seat. "Not a very joyful welcome to the grandson whom you have not seen for so long."

"Why should I be glad to see you?" and the old grandmother took up her thread again, and set her wheel whirling. "You never were anything but a thorn in my side with your mischievous, disobedient ways. I'll be bound you wouldn't be here now if there was n't some favor you wanted of me."

"Why don't you think I came just for the pleasure of seeing you?"

"Because that's too unlike you. Come, now; what is it you want? Out with it."

"Well, since you will have it, Granny, I want you to make me a new suit of clothes; one of your really fine ones such as you alone can make."

"So you think to get round me with your compliments; but I know how much that means. You do need some new clothes, though," and the old creature looked him up and down. "What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Oh, travelling about the world. I do look rather ragged," and the elf glanced down at himself, and pulled off a piece of cloth that dangled from his cuff. His clothes were indeed in a poor

plight, ragged and faded and worn, and too small for him, too, for he had grown since he left the old hickory tree, so long ago. "I would n't like the fairies at the grove to see me in this state," he muttered half to himself. "They'd never believe I'd learned magic."

"Oh, those fairies!" grumbled the grandmother.
"Nasty stuck-up things! I never could understand why you wanted to live among them, anyway.
Why couldn't you be satisfied to be with elves like yourself?"

"The fairies are all right, Granny," said Night-shade good-humoredly. "They shan't be stuck-up with me, I can promise you. Maybe I'll marry one of them some day. There's a very pretty little fairy there named Bluebell. But come now, you'll make me the clothes, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose you'll have to have them, but they're not a thing to be made in a day. You'll have to be content to bide here for a while if you want me to make them."

"All the better, Granny; that suits me, even if you do grumble and scold at me all the time."

"Precious little good it does you, anyway," the old woman muttered, pushing aside her spinningwheel. Then she hobbled over to the great worm-

hole where she kept the rolls of fine cloth, green and red, for which she was so famous among the elves, and began to lift out some of the pieces. "Yes, I'll make them, but you'll have to stay here



"... hobbled over to the great worm-hole where she kept the rolls of fine cloth."

till they 're done. Yes, you 'll have to stay here," she repeated over and over.

Indeed it suited Nightshade well enough to spend a week there with the old elf. It would give him a chance to rest, and the home hollow

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was a cozy place. So for the next few days, while the old grandmother snipped and fitted and sewed, he lay about in the sunshine dozing away the hours, or thinking of the journeyin search of magic from which he and the two bees alone had returned.

Nightshade spent a great deal of time wondering just what had become of Red Cap. He had never seen him since he had disappeared through the flames with the Sun Queen, though he had lingered there on the edge of the forest a long time. He hardly thought he would ever see the fairy again. One might perhaps pass alive between those blazing door posts, but he did not believe that one could do it twice.

No, Red Cap would never return, and now what Nightshade wanted to do was to make the most out of the journey he had taken, and to explain to the fairies of the grove how it happened that Red Cap had not come back with him. He did not mean to tell things as they really had occurred, however. Oh, no; that would never do. What would they all think if they were to learn that, after travelling so far in search of magic, he had come back no wiser than he had started? Luckily the two bees could not talk, so Nightshade might say what he

chose of the journey and there would be no one to contradict him.

Before he left the old ash tree where his grandmother lived he had it all arranged—just what he was going to say.

He was a very different looking creature when he set out again for the fairies' grove from what he had been when he appeared before the old spinner a few days before.

In the first place he looked less travel-worn and weary; then his hair had been neatly trimmed by his grandmother, and he was dressed from top to toe in a new suit, fine and handsome, such as she alone of all the elves could make.

Nightshade looked down at himself well pleased. "Well, Granny," he said, "I will say this, that in all the grove there's not a fairy who wears any finer clothes than those my elf grandmother makes for me."

That pleased the old creature, and she let him kiss her withered cheek, and bade him good-bye and good luck quite pleasantly. Then she stood staring after him as he flew away through the forest arches, the two bees at his heels. "A hand-some elf," she muttered to herself, "and a stout one, too, but I pity any one who trusts him for a friend."

Meanwhile, untroubled by any care of what his grandmother might be thinking, Nightshade flew gayly along through the waving lights and shadows of the forest.

He flew fast and steadily, and it was not so very long before he reached the familiar grove and heard the joyous calls and laughter of the fairies at play under the ferns.

Then he alighted on the mosses and walked slowly over toward his old ash tree.

Presently the fairies caught sight of him.

"Look! Look!" they cried. "Who is that?"
"I do believe it's Nightshade." "No it is n't."
"But it is, though."

Then all the fairies came crowding around him pouring out questions. "Where had he been all this time?" "Where was Red Cap?" "And had he learned magic as he had set out to do?"

"Learned magic? Of course I have. Would I have come back here, think you, and looking like this, unless I had?"

The fairies looked at him and were obliged to confess that he did not look like one who had failed. As to the other questions Nightshade did not care to answer them then and there. His story, when he was ready to tell it, was for the older fairies,—

those who were of position and importance in the grove.

He flew up to the hole in his hickory tree and disappeared, while the fairies stood staring after him in respectful silence.

They did not stand there long, however. Soon they separated, running away to their houses to tell the news that Nightshade had returned, and returned knowing, so he said, all the magic he had set out to learn.

Soon all the grove was in a buzz over the news.

None, however, were as excited as the Peaspods and old Grandaddy Dandelion. "But what can it mean?" cried the little mother, almost weeping. "Why did n't Red Cap come back with him? What can have happened to the child?"

"Do not trouble over that, daughter," said the old fairy Dandelion. "No harm has happened to the boy; of that I am as sure as that the dandelions turn from gold to white. No harm could come to him with that talisman about his neck."

"But he may have lost it."

"Not he. I'm surprised that you do not know him better. If he has not returned with the elf it is for some reason that is more a credit to him than to Nightshade."

"At any rate we'll hear all about it this evening, for there is to be a great meeting of the fairies, and then Nightshade is to recount his travels before them all, but until then there are orders that he is to be allowed to rest," said Father Peaspod.

And so it was that it had been arranged; a great honor to the elf indeed; but Nightshade, who had travelled to the land of magic and had returned tall and fine and bringing with him wisdom such as had never been in the grove before, was a very different person from the mischievous elf who had sat at the mouth of the old squirrel hole throwing down empty nut-shells at the fairies below.

That evening the grove was made very gay indeed for the great meeting that was to be held. There had been some talk of holding it at the opening up the stream where the fairies went to dance. The objection to that, however, was that the fairy mothers could not leave their babies to go so far away, and as they were as anxious to hear about the magic as any one, it was decided he should recount his adventures in the home grove where it would be convenient for all.

They made things as festal as possible, however, by hanging the twigs and ferns with count-

less fire-flies and with long strings of berries, orange, red, or purplish blue.

The meeting was held as soon as the fairy mothers could get their babies to sleep. Every fairy in the grove who was old enough was there. They sat about in a big circle upon mats woven of milk-weed silk; or simply on spiders' webs folded to make them thick and soft.

When all were assembled and silence had been called for, Nightshade stepped out into the middle of the circle and began to tell them of his adventures.

"Perhaps you don't know," he began, "that I already knew a great deal about magic when I started out with Red Cap. Bluebell knows something about it. I showed her some of my magic. Just in a small way, to be sure, but still it was magic."

He stopped and looked at Bluebell. All the other fairies looked at her, too, while she blushed red at finding herself so stared at. "You remember, don't you, Bluebell?" asked Nightshade, and the young fairy nodded without raising her eyelids; she felt so shy it brought the tears into her eyes.

"Yes, I never made any talk about it, but I

could have surprised you all if I had chosen. Still, that, of course, was nothing compared to all that I have learned since I have been away."

Then Nightshade began to tell them of his journey. He told all about it from the time he and



"Then Nightshade began to tell them of his journey."

Red Cap started, to the time of their return to the parting of the ways. Only how different he made it all sound from the way it had really been! He made it seem as though it were he who had done

all the brave and wise things, and that Red Cap had only followed his lead.

When he spoke of how the gray man had tried to get the talisman the elf pretended that he had told Red Cap not to give it up.

Then when he came to the part where his comrade had eaten of the magic fruit, he made it seem as though it were in spite of his warnings and entreaties. "I myself was faint with hunger," said Nightshade, "but I remembered the warbler's warnings and would touch nothing."

So it was with everything the elf told. He twisted it in just that way.

Last of all he recounted how they had found the Sun Queen, and how she had led them into the forest to the wall of fire. At that point he paused, while the listening fairies drew their breaths deeply.

"Then," Nightshade went on, "the Sun Queen turned to us, and said, 'Keep a brave heart, and neither fire nor water shall harm you. Will you take my hand and come with me into my house?' She held out her hands, and I said, 'I will go with you even through the fire,' and I laid my hand in hers.

"But Red Cap was frightened. He shrank back

and said, 'I am afraid. I would rather never learn magic than go through those flames.'

"The Sun Queen looked at him pityingly and I urged and entreated him to come with us, but he would not for all I could say. I went with her, however. The flames rolled aside before us and then closed together again, but Red Cap was left behind."

At that moment Grandaddy Dandelion sprang to his feet as though he were a young fairy once more. "And you mean to say," he cried in a voice of wrath, "that you went on, and Red Cap stayed behind, even with the talisman upon his breast?"

Nightshade looked down and nodded sadly. "It was even so," he said; "and yet I can scarcely blame him. Those flames were enough to daunt even the bravest."

"Then" cried the old fairy in a loud voice, "I say to you now that I do not believe it. I do not believe that Red Cap ever turned back from any place where elf, or fairy either, would venture. Where he is I do not know, nor why he should not have returned with you; but this I do know, he is no coward, and when he returns, as he surely will, he will tell us the rights of the story. Until

then I will wait. Come, daughter," and he touched the weeping Mother Peaspod on the shoulder. "Have you not heard enough from this elf? Let us go back to our hollow."

Hanging her head and weeping softly Mother Peaspod arose. The old fairy put his arm about her and led her away, followed by Father Peaspod.

After the three had gone there was a silence among the crowd of fairies; then they began to murmur among themselves, some saying that it was a shame to speak to Nightshade in that manner; some doubting whether the Peaspods were not, after all, in the right, there was no one to say whether the elf was giving the truth of the matter.

Nightshade heard something of this.

"Friends," he said, raising his voice above the murmurs, "I do not blame old Dandelion; no, nor Father nor Mother Peaspod, either, for what they have said to me. No wonder they feel badly that their son should not have dared to risk what I, a poor humble elf, had the courage to do. But why, if Red Cap went through the fire—why did he not come back with me? I'll tell you why he did not return. He was ashamed to own that he had failed. No doubt he is lurking about in the woods

by himself some place, ashamed to show his face. Or perhaps he has joined some other tribe of fairies where his story is not known."

This seemed very reasonable, and the fairies were inclined to believe it, but one of the older ones said that he thought it would be well for Nightshade to show them some of the magic he had learned.

This was what the elf had been afraid of all along, but when he had been laying his plans at his old grandmother's, he had made up his mind what he would say when they asked him to show his magic.

So he answered them calmly that he would be very willing to do this but for two things. The first was that he was still weary from his journey, and doing magic was very hard work. The second was that he was thinking of sometime starting a school for magic, open to all fairies, young and old. Of course if he was going to do that he did not care to show his magic beforehand. Perhaps after a while he might show them some few tricks, but not until he had rested. Of course no one could doubt that he knew magic. Bluebell could tell them he did.

Then Bluebell, shy and blushing, was pushed [ 140 ]

forward, and told them that she had indeed seen Nightshade work a very wonderful piece of magic. It was only one but it was very wonderful indeed.

After that every one was obliged to believe, for no one could doubt the little Bluebell.

The fairies all separated soon after, going home to their different hollows, and as they went all the talk was of what a clever elf Nightshade was, and of how fine it would be to have a school of magic in their grove.

Every one felt sorry for the Peaspods, and spoke of how sad it was for them to have such a poor sort of a son as Red Cap had turned out to be.

As for Nightshade he felt quite safe. He could put off opening his school for a long time, first for one reason then for another; it was easy to befool the forest fairies, they were so honest and simple minded themselves. Then if they should insist upon seeing some of his magic, perhaps he could think up some way to trick them, just as he had tricked Bluebell about the cocoon.

#### CHAPTER XII

#### A MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

ND now the elf Nightshade had great respect paid him.

There was much talk about the

school, and they wanted the elf to say how soon he meant to open it, but he always managed to put them off when they began to talk in this way.

The older of the fairies thought that any one as wise as Nightshade ought to be treated with all the honor possible, so a fine large hollow was chosen for him, and the fairies took pride in furnishing it handsomely. They also presented him with two fine bees, so he was well fixed.

He was particularly glad of this last present, as he had grown so used to feeding on bee-bread that he hardly would have known how to do without it, and Buzzfuzz had deserted him as soon as he had reached the grove, flying back to the old hollow in the white oak where he had been raised.

Nightshade would have liked to claim him again, and had thoughts of saying that Red Cap had given the bee to him, but he was somewhat afraid of Grandaddy Dandelion. At any rate he had no real need of Buzzfuzz after the present of the two young bees.

Late one afternoon, about a week after Night-shade's return, and when the fairies were all gathered at their early suppers, the silence of the grove was suddenly broken by the clear, shrill sound of fairy trumpets, playing a gay fanfaronade.

All the fairies jumped up from their tables and hurried out to the knot-holes to see what was coming, and Nightshade too came out to look, like all the rest.

There they saw a pretty sight.

Winging their way across the glade with stately leisure came five stranger fairies, clad in green and silver, and wearing crimson caps upon their heads; it was the livery of those belonging to the court of the fairy queen.

The two who came first carried tiny silver trumpets in their hands upon which they blew now and then. Following them was one in long robes and bearing a sealed roll in his hands, and last came two more pages with ivory wands. The five

made a gay appearance as they winged across the grove.

Stopping at the first knot-hole one of the pages inquired of the fairies there which was the hollow where the elf named Nightshade lived.

"It is in the oak tree over yonder," answered



"The five made a gay appearance as they winged across the grove."

the father fairy, pointing. "Shall I go with you to show you the way?"

"I think I see the tree you mean; but you may follow for I bring a message from the fairy queen, and though it is especially for Nightshade it were as well that all the fairies of the glade should hear it." Then he and the others flew slowly away toward the tree.

The forest fairies, filled with curiosity as to what the message could be about, made haste to throw aside the tiny napkins which they still held, and to follow. The crowd had grown to great size by the time it gathered around the tree where the elf lived.

When Nightshade saw the courtly visitors coming toward him, followed by all the others, he hardly knew whether to be frightened or not. He had not yet decided when the court fairies paused and saluted him, and he of the long robe began to speak. "Are you the elf named Nightshade?" he asked.

"I am," answered the elf.

"The Nightshade who travelled beyond the parting of the ways in search of magic?"

"The very same."

"Then I bring you greetings and a message from the Queen of Fairyland. Listen, all, and I will read the word she deigns to send."

So saying the messenger broke the seal of the roll he carried, and opening the paper began to read what was written on it in a loud, clear voice.

This was the message. The Fairy Queen had heard of the journey Nightshade had taken in search of magic; had heard, too, that he had found

the Sun Queen and had been taught by her. Further, report said he had brought back with him knowledge new to the fairies of her court, where the same magic has been handed down from one generation to another, with almost no changes. She was therefore going to do a great honor to Nightshade and the fairies of the glade. The next night she herself and all her retinue would come to the grove, there to hold court, and to hear and see Nightshade work some of his wonderful enchantments.

When the messenger had finished reading this message there was a moment's silence, and then all the fairies shouted aloud, huzzahing and throwing their wee caps up in the air with joy over the honor to be done them. They huzzahed for the queen and for the messenger, and then most loudly of all for the elf himself.

Nightshade, however, stood there with shaking legs and a pale face, for he knew no magic to show the queen, and he did not know what would happen to him when he confessed to this. However, he said nothing, and every one thought it was with pleasure that he turned so pale.

"Shall I tell her majesty that you will be ready for her?" asked the messenger with stately courtesy.

"Ye-yes" stammered Nightshade. "And I—I thank her majesty for the honor done me."

"It is well; I will carry her your answer." Then at a gesture the pages again blew upon their trumpets sweet and clear, and the strangers spread their wings and flew slowly across the glade and out of sight as they had come.

Scarcely were they gone when the whole glade was in a bustle. There was much work to be done before they would be properly prepared for such a visit, and the time was short indeed. Flowers must be brought; the whole glade should be turned into a bower. Hundreds and hundreds of glow-worms and fire-flies must be caught. Then there should be bonfires, too. Oh, it would be a great occasion indeed.

In the midst of all this general rejoicing, however, one family was sad of heart, and watched with mournful eyes the preparations for the queen's visit. To the Peaspods the honors paid to Nightshade seemed to throw the greater scorn upon poor Red Cap, whom all except themselves believed to have failed where the elf had succeeded.

But there was one other person in the grove who was even more unhappy than the Peaspods, and that one was Nightshade himself. He was

in a bad plight indeed. To have the fairy queen and all her court come to see him work some wonderful magic, when he did not even know the simplest tricks such as were easy to every fairy of the court! And he could not deceive them with some pretended magic as he had the simple-hearted Bluebell. The court fairies knew too much for that.

He thought to himself that perhaps it would be better for him to go away immediately, but it seemed too hard to be obliged to give up his comfortable home and all the luxuries that the fairies had provided for him. Then, perhaps, something would happen to prevent the queen's coming, or he might be able to think of some plan to escape from the trial. He might even fall ill and be excused on that account. He certainly felt far from well with all this worry.

So the elf tossed restlessly about on his bed all night, unable to sleep.

When morning came at last he hastily swallowed his breakfast and then wandered away, trying to get out of sight of all the gay preparations.

The fairies were quite willing to leave him to himself. They had too great a respect for him now to think of asking him to help them with their

work. They whispered among themselves that he wanted to be by himself to think over his magic and to decide what parts of it would be most pleasing to the fairy queen.

Nightshade wandered away and on and on until he was so far from the glade that he could no longer hear the fairies shouting gaily at their work. He did indeed wish to be alone, but not for the reason they thought.

Glancing up he was annoyed to see some one coming toward him from an opposite direction. If they both kept on they would soon meet.

Nightshade turned aside, hoping the new-comer would pass by without noticing him, but suddenly he was startled by a joyous cry from the stranger. "Nightshade! Surely it is Nightshade!"

The elf turned quickly, and then he, too, gave a cry of surprise. "Red Cap! No, it cannot be!"

"Yes, but it is, though," cried Red Cap, as that fairy himself came running across the moss, holding out both hands to the elf.

"But — but I thought you were lost," stammered Nightshade. "How did you escape from the flames, and where have you been all this time?"

"I've been learning magic with the Sun Queen.

She taught me such things,—such wonderful things!" and the fairy looked dreamily up toward the green leaves overhead.

"But the flames! How did you come out from them again?"

"When one has studied magic with the Sun Queen, one has no fear of flames nor fire; no more than of so much pure sunlight." Suddenly he started and spread his wings. "But I must hurry on. I can hardly wait to see the dear father and mother; and old Grandaddy Dandelion, too."

But Nightshade stopped him with a hand laid upon his arm. "Wait a moment. I would not hurry on too fast," he said.

"Why not?" asked the fairy sharply. "What is it? Has anything happened to my dear ones?"

"No; oh, no. Wait. I will tell you in a moment." Nightshade hesitated. He was thinking hard and fast. He must plan some way to keep Red Cap from appearing before the fairies just then, for the minute they saw him and heard his story, they would know how Nightshade had been deceiving them. And the elf must make up his mind to leaving before the queen came; that very hour indeed. There was no hope for him now that Red Cap had returned. He would just

go back to his hollow for his bees and such things as he could carry away with him; but even for this he must gain time.

So he spoke at last. "There's nothing the matter with any one, but I'll tell you just how it is. You see the Fairy Queen is going to pay our fairies of the glade a great honor. She has heard that they are very much interested in magic, so she is coming to night and bringing all her court, and they are going to work some magic for us. Now of course you have learned a lot of fresh magic from the Sun Queen, and if our fairies find you've come home they'll want you to show all you know. Then think how the queen and all the court will feel to have you showing off magic so much better than theirs."

"But I need n't show my magic," said Red Cap wistfully. "And I should so like to be there and see our Fairy Queen. I've never seen her, you know."

"Well, of course it's just as you please." Night-shade spoke indifferently. "Only you know how it is. You couldn't be there without *some one's* whispering it to her. Our fairies would be so proud of you that they could never keep the secret."

"Perhaps you are right," said Red Cap sadly. "But what shall I do (>-night if I don't go

home? I suppose I can find a hole or cranny some place where I can sleep, but I am so tired, so worn and weary, that I long to be at home."

"I'll fix all that," said Nightshade quickly. "I'll tell you what to do. If you go to sleep about here some one might happen to run across you, but no one will think of coming to my hollow to-day. They're all too busy. We'll wait until dinner-time when nobody is about, and then you can go home with me, and stay quietly hidden until to-morrow, and then come out and surprise everybody."

Red Cap was willing for this, though it did seem terribly hard to have to wait another day, and to miss his chance of seeing the queen; a chance he might never have again.

Suddenly he started, and a look of joy came into his face. "Isn't that Bluebell?" he cried. "Surely I can't be mistaken."

Nightshade gave a hasty glance back toward the glade. Red Cap had seen truly. There was Bluebell coming directly toward them through the green shadows of the wood. "Oh, hide your face; don't let her see you," cried the elf in a panic.

"But it's little Bluebell! I must speak to her. She's so true she would never tell."



"'Oh, hide your face; don't let her see you."



"She is the last fairy in the glade who must know you're here. Don't you see she's so fond of you that for that very reason she could n't help letting people see her joy over your return?"

"Perhaps you're right. But it's very hard."

"Yes, I'm right. Hide your face and I'll go on and get her away somehow."

Red Cap reluctantly did as Nightshade bade him, turning his back and hanging his head that Bluebell might not recognize him.

The little fairy had now caught sight of the two, and as she did so she stopped short staring hard at the stranger, of whom, however, she could only see the back.

When Nightshade came up to her she caught him by the arm. "Tell me, Nightshade," she whispered. "Who is that?"

"Oh, just a strange fairy I happened to meet here in the woods," answered the elf easily.

"No, it is not. You cannot deceive me. I know who it is; it is Red Cap. But why does he turn away? Oh, I will fly and speak to him."

But Nightshade caught her by the arm. "Yes," he said, "it is Red Cap, but you had better not speak to him just now."

"Why not?"

"To tell you the truth he is so sad and so ashamed over not having learned magic that he cannot bear the thought of meeting any one. Then he is all ragged and worn. When he saw you he cried, 'Oh, don't let her speak to me.' No, just let me get him quietly to my hollow, and when we have mended his clothes and he has slept he'll be more willing to see people. But don't trouble him just now; he's almost sick as it is."

"You have a kind heart, Nightshade," said Bluebell, "and I will do as you say." Then the tears rose to her eyes. "I shouldn't have thought he would have minded seeing *me*, but of course if he doesn't want to I won't trouble him;" and Bluebell turned slowly away. Then spreading her wings she flew off in another direction.

"What did she say?" asked Red Cap eagerly, as Nightshade came back to him. "Did she guess who it was?"

"No, of course not. She just happened to come this way, but she's gone now."

Red Cap said nothing, but he was disappointed. It seemed to him he would have known Bluebell anywhere, even if he had only seen her back. But then, perhaps she was not so fond of him as he was of her.

Nightshade's plan worked exactly as he wished. Having waited until the fairies were all at dinner the two flew to Nightshade's hollow without being seen. Not until they were safely in, however, and a dead leaf pushed before the knot-hole, did Nightshade draw a full breath.

The elf bustled about setting out a dinner for himself and his visitor. Red Cap was surprised to see how handsomely Nightshade was living now, but he said nothing about it, fearing it might not seem polite.

When they were seated at the table, and the elf had helped each to a large plateful of good things, he began to question Red Cap as to the magic he had learned in the Sun Queen's house. He was itching to hear about it.

Red Cap was willing enough to tell.

It was all very wonderful. Nightshade listened with both ears, almost forgetting to eat his dinner in his interest.

"All that is very fine," he said at last, with a long breath, "but can you do all the magic you choose now?"

"Yes, all."

"And how is it you do it, anyway? Could n't you teach me a little? Just two or three little

tricks?" For it had suddenly struck Nightshade that if he could get Red Cap to give him a few lessons between then and night time he might be able to make some show before the fairy queen, after all.

"No," answered Red Cap, "I couldn't teach you." Nightshade's face fell. "You see," went on the fairy, "it's all in a wand the Sun Queen gave me when I was coming away. I just hold the wand in my hand and tell it what I want it to do. Then I wave it three times and cry, 'Abracadabraca! be it as I say,' and then the magic does itself."

"Have you the wand about you?" asked the elf eagerly.

"Yes I have," and Red Cap drew out the wand; it had been stuck through his belt at the side though Nightshade had not noticed it. It was a slender, golden rod, with a star upon the end; a star that sparkled so brightly as Red Cap held it up that it filled all the hollow with its light.

Nightshade's eyes sparkled. "May I see it?" he cried, stretching out his hand.

"You may look at it," answered Red Cap. "But it must not go out of my possession."

The elf examined the wand eagerly. He could hardly keep himself from snatching it out of Red

Cap's hands. To think that if he only could get that wand for himself he could do all that was expected of him that evening! Yes, and could win such honors and fame as had never fallen to the lot of any elf.

But after Nightshade had looked at it for a while the fairy put it back through his belt.

When dinner was over Red Cap said he was very sleepy. He was so worn out that he must lie down and rest, for his journey had been long and hard.

This suited Nightshade exactly. He was very kind and made the fairy as comfortable as he could. Then as Red Cap's eyes began to close, the elf stole away softly and left him there.

But he was not going far. He had a plan by which he meant to gain possession of the wand for that night at least. After that he would see. Perhaps he would give it back to Red Cap again, but perhaps not. After all there seemed no such great reason why the fairy should have it instead of himself. Both had taken the journey. Both had run the risks. The only thing was that Red Cap had gone through the fire, and Nightshade had n't, but that was n't everything.

So reasoning with himself Nightshade flew rap-

idly away toward an open place in the forest where he remembered having once seen a bunch of poppies growing. The seed must have been dropped there by some bird. That was some time ago, and he was terribly afraid it might not be in bloom now.

When he reached the spot, however, he saw, to his delight, a great scarlet flower burning red in the greenness.

He shook its stem, and a leaf fell off. He folded this leaf into a long roll like a roll of satin, and taking it under his arm he hastened back with it to the hollow.

When he entered the knot-hole he found that Red Cap was sleeping heavily. Moving softly about so as not to awaken him, Nightshade took a cup and filled it with honey dew. Into this he squeezed some drops of poppy juice. Poppy juice he knew would throw one into a deep sleep. He did not want, with what he meant to do, to run any risk of Red Cap's awakening.

Then he sat down to wait. All afternoon he sat watching by the side of the sleeping fairy.

At last as the light began to fade into dusk in the forest arches outside, and as the sky grew pale

# A Message from the Queen

and bats flitted noiselessly about like shadows, Nightshade wakened the fairy.

When Red Cap slowly and unwillingly opened his eyes, he saw the elf standing beside him, a cup in his hand. "Come, Red Cap, it is time for supper," he said.

"I don't want any supper. Oh, let me rest," answered the fairy drowsily. "I am so sleepy."

"Then at least drink this." The elf spoke in a kindly tone. "It will make your sleep the sweeter," and he offered the cup to Red Cap.

The fairy took the cup and drank deeply. Then he fell back again upon the pillow, and once more sank into heavy slumber.

Nightshade waited until he was quite sure that Red Cap was asleep. Then bending over the fairy the elf gently drew away the magic wand and thrust it into his own belt. "Now I am ready to stand before the queen and show her some magic worth the seeing," he whispered to himself.

With a triumphant look on his face, he stepped through the knot-hole and flew down into the glade where the lights were already beginning to shine out brightly.

#### CHAPTER XIII

#### MORE MAGIC THAN WAS LOOKED FOR

HE glade was a beautiful sight that night. The fairies had flown far and near and searched out the most beautiful blossoms there were to be found.

Everywhere, on twigs and leaves, pulsed the light of countless fireflies. They were fastened in place by strands of spider-web, and the next morning the fairies would set them free again unharmed.

The queen's throne, which was made of a large wax-white blossom, was set on a high platform made of mosses as soft as velvet.

There was also a seat prepared for Nightshade, and it was on a platform about half as high as that of the queen.

The fairies were all in their best and gayest clothes and it was a sight worth seeing.

All this was as nothing, however, compared with the brightness of the glade after the queen and her court arrived. Then there was a waving of

banners, and sparkling of gems. Many of her attendants carried torches that burned with different colors, red, blue, green, and yellow. All was a blaze of gayety and light.

When the queen was seated on her throne, the oldest of the glade fairies stepped forward and made a speech telling her of the joy they felt in the honor she had done them, and of how happy it made them to see her there.

Then there were songs and dances to entertain her. After they were ended the Fairy Queen bade Nightshade approach her. She made him come up on the platform beside her, and began to question him about magic.

All grew silent and strained their ears to catch what he should say. And Nightshade answered her well, for he repeated the things that Red Cap had told to him. It was easy to see by the queen's face that she was very much pleased.

"But after all," said Nightshade at last, "though I studied hard and long my best magic lies in this golden wand," and he drew from his belt the wand which he had stolen from Red Cap's side.

"All this is very interesting," said the queen.
"And now I would see you work some magic with your wand."

"Very well;" answered Nightshade readily.

"I will command a feast to appear before your majesty; a magic feast."

"That is not a very new trick," said the queen, "but still, it will do well enough to begin with."

"But this shall be a feast such as you have never seen before." Then Nightshade waved the wand three times, and commanded that there should be spread for all there a feast more magnificent than was ever seen before. "Abracadabraca! be it as I say," he concluded.

Immediately, and shaping itself out of nothing at all, appeared a long table. It was covered with a silken cover that shone with its own light as the fairy queen had never seen anything shine before. And no wonder, for it was silk, woven from the magic of the Sun Queen.

Upon this table was set forth a feast such as to make the mouth water with its deliciousness; and all was served in tiny dishes and goblets made of wondrous gems. Each one was shaped from one jewel. And not only this, but from these gems themselves came a delightful sound of delicate music, each dish and goblet adding a tone of its own, but all as exquisitely blended as the colors on the table, and the perfume of the feast.

All stared with amazement at this beautiful magic, and the queen herself could not resist a cry of admiration. Then she arose from her throne. "Nightshade, you shall lead me to the feast," she said.

All this had taken but a short time. Every one had been too busy looking at the table to have any eyes for Nightshade. If they had glanced at him they would have been amazed, for the moment he had spoken the magic words a look of pain and terror had come into his face. His features twisted with anguish. Even as the queen spoke the elf gave a loud cry and threw the wand he had been holding as far away as he could.

The fact of the matter was, that as soon as the wand heard him bid it spread a feast it began to burn with magic. It burned hotter and hotter in the elf's hand. Red Cap would not have minded this, nor even noticed it perhaps, for he had studied with the Sun Queen, and no heat nor fire could harm him. But it was otherwise with the elf. It was agony to him.

He had stood it as long as he could, clinching his teeth together to keep from shrieking out, but as the queen arose he could bear it no longer, and

so it was that he had cried out and thrown the wand away.

But this was not the end of it. The moment the wand touched the earth it turned into a fiery serpent. This way and that it twisted and slid, and everything it touched began to scorch and smoke. It writhed against the table and in a moment the cover was on fire and everything blazed up. It touched the flowers and they were charred and burnt. The fairies shrieked and flew up into the trees. All were in a panic.

But Nightshade was the first to fly. Darting up to his knot-hole he ran into the hollow and caught Red Cap by the shoulder, dragging him from the bed.

"Come, come, Red Cap," he shrieked, "or your wand will burn up all the forest."

He dragged the fairy, half awake, out to the edge of the knot-hole.

But when Red Cap looked down and saw what was happening below all sleep left him. With a cry he darted down toward where the flaming serpent was writhing its zigzag course.

He hovered over it watching his chance, and then like a flash he caught it by the tail and lifted it from the ground.

As he did so the snake became once more a harmless golden rod in his hand.

Then he looked about at the smoking glade,

and the frightened fairies. "What is this?" he said sternly. "Who has dared to steal my wand and to try to work magic with it?"

"It was Nightshade," answered the weeping fairies all together.

The fairy queen alone was calm. She still stood on her platform, and though she was very pale, she gazed at Red Cap keenly.

The fairy turned,



"Like a flash he caught it by the tail, and lifted it from the ground."

to Nightshade. "So!" he said. "Was it for this you wished to know about my magic? Better would it have been for you if you had known either a little more or a little less."

" Your magic," said the queen.

Then Red Cap turned and knelt before her. He knew who she was immediately.

"Forgive me, your majesty," he said. "I did not mean that you should be troubled with the little magic that I have picked up on my travels. Indeed it was so that nothing might be said about it that I was going to stay hidden in yon hollow until to-morrow. I feared the fairies of our glade might, out of their foolish friendliness, try to bring me forward; try to make me show off my new learning."

"But," said the queen, "it was in hopes of seeing some new magic that we came here this evening,—the wonderful magic that Nightshade had learned from the Sun Queen; or at least so we believed at first, but now it begins to seem that we were mistaken in thinking him so learned."

"Ah, I begin to see," said Red Cap. And indeed he did begin to understand how it all was, for he was no longer the simple-minded lad he had been when he first started out from the old home hollow on his journey through the world. Then he looked about him. "The first thing I will do, I will, with your majesty's permission, right

the harm that my magic wand has done," he said.

With that he waved the wand and commanded that everything should be as it had been before, and immediately it was so; every flower, every leaf, was again fresh and blooming; the table was again spread with the feast, and once more the magic dishes took up their sweet, faint music, and this time there was no trouble with the magic wand.

The queen held out her hand to Red Cap. "It shall be your honor," she said, "to lead me to the table." Then she turned a severe look upon Nightshade where he stood with drooping head, and so ashamed that he longed to sink through the ground. "As for you, Nightshade," she added, "what punishment do you not deserve for the deceit you have tried to practise upon us?"

But Nightshade sank upon his knees before her, begging her to forgive him. Red Cap joined his prayer to Nightshade's, telling the queen that the elf had been a faithful comrade to him through all their wanderings. He told, too, how Nightshade had suffered all the hardships of the journey just as he had himself, except that he had failed in the last one.

As she listened the queen's looks softened. "Very well," said she; "for your sake I will forgive him, and he shall not be punished further than this, that he shall be banished from this glade forever and return to his own people, the elves. That is best at any rate, for like should be with like; otherwise trouble is sure to come of it as it did just now."

Nightshade was glad enough to get off so easily. Indeed he was not greatly grieved over being sent back among the elves again, especially after all that had happened. He might still hope to be of some importance among them, while from henceforth he could only be an object of scorn to the fairies.

But now there was one more interruption. All the while that this had been going on Mother Peaspod, followed by the father and the old Grandaddy Dandelion, had been working her way through the crowd toward Red Cap. Now she could restrain herself no longer. "My son! my dear, dear son!" she cried, and flying to Red Cap she flung her arms about his neck. Red Cap kissed her with tears in his eyes, and then turned to greet his father and his grandfather. "I knew it would all be well with you in the end, with that

talisman about your neck," said the old Grandaddy in his quavering voice.

The queen looked on at the greetings with an indulgent smile, and when they went to the feast she commanded that the Peaspods should



"The queen questioned Red Cap further about his magic."

be placed next to Red Cap, who sat at her right hand.

Then all went merrily, and after they had feasted and drunk the queen questioned Red Cap further about his magic.

He told her much. Far more than Nightshade [ 169 ]

had been able to. He also showed her magic more wonderful than any she had ever dreamed of before. But always as he played his enchantments it was toward Bluebell the fairy glanced. He cared more for her wonder and delight than for what any one else could say; and Bluebell thought that there never had been a fairy so wise and generous and handsome as Red Cap was.

The queen was so pleased with what she saw that she would have liked to take Red Cap back to court with her, promising him the greatest honors that were hers to give; but Red Cap thanked her and said no. He had travelled far and seen much, but in no place could he be so happy as in his own glade, and among his own dear people.

So the queen was obliged to go away without him, and there he stayed among the well-known trees, and was held in great honor and respect by all.

The queen did not forget him. Often a messenger arrived bringing him presents and kind words from her majesty, and every year she herself paid a visit to the glade to eat of Red Cap's magic feasts, and to see him work his enchantments.

After a while Red Cap married Bluebell, and always he said that the best enchantment in the whole world was that that shone about him from her dear eyes.







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